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Black Eyes and Blue.

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CHAPTER I.

HIGH WORDS AND HARD.

Two girls formed the center of a group, all standing on the bridge which crossed Silver Creek at the entrance to the little village of Lycurgus, nestled among hills in a rural portion of the State of New Hampshire.

This was Saturday and these were the "Academy girls," who had taken advantage of the lovely, warm holiday, to improvise a strawberry-party. They had been ranging the hills and meadows all the long, sunny afternoon, and were now on their way home. Loitering

on the bridge, some unpleasant words had been exchanged between Florence Goldsborough and Violet Vernon, for which Florence, as usual, was to blame.

It seemed the inevitable destiny of those two girls to be rivals in everything. Yet Violet would never have felt any consciousness of rivalry, had not Florence perpetually exhibited a petty jealousy that was painful to its object.

Perhaps the two looked all the handsomer for the excitement which flashed in their eyes and burned on their cheeks, as the sun, sinking behind the low mountains, touched their bright young heads with a hand of gold, gently, as if reproving them. School-girls, of sixteen summers, they were. Altogether the prettiest of the flock, and already acknowledged the coming belles of the village.

Florence had hair so black that it took a purple tinge in the sun, and hung down to her waist in

crisp waves. Her figure was slight and peculiarly graceful, even at that "unformed" age; her complexion was a smooth, dazzling olive, with little threads of scarlet showing in the cheeks; her eyes were deep, dark and lustrous, and could be as soft and bewitching as ever a girl's eyes were; though, at this moment of her introduction to the reader, they flashed fire. Her father being the richest man in the village, and she the only daughter, Florence was "a spoiled child," too used to having her own way.

Violet was a little taller than Florence; her skin was cool and fair, with a color in the cheeks and lips like that of the wild May rose which she held in her hand; the lashes over her dark-blue eyes were so long and thick that people often mistook the eyes for hazel; her pale-gold hair, as wavy in the sunlight as a field of ripe wheat, was so burdensome in length and quantity that she had braided it half-way down in a



"I MEAN," SHE SAID, WITH THE INTENSE DISTINCTIVENESS OF SCORN, "THAT NO ONE EVER KNEW WHO YOUR PARENTS ARE."

thick braid, leaving the ends to burst out below the blue ribbon in a thousand shining ripples. She had on her sweet face, at that instant, an offended expression, and the wild-rose flush on her cheeks deepened and deepened; but she had none of the angry, wicked fire in her eyes which flashed from Florence Goldsborough's.

"At least, I know who my parents are, and that they are respectable people!" Florence was saying, with a spiteful smile.

"And do not I?" Violet rejoined, hastily. "My father may not be quite as rich as yours, but he is as much respected. As to my poor mamma—she died when I was born—and it is shameful of you to refer to the dead."

"Wait till I know she is dead?" was the scornful rejoinder.

"What do you mean?" asked Violet, opening her eyes very wide, her lip trembling as if she would have said more but could not.

"Oh, hush!" "Florence, you ought not, really!" "For shame!" interfered several of their companions as the fiery brunette began her answer; but Florence was in one of her passions, during which to expostulate with her did as much good as to combat a whirlwind with a feather.

"I mean," she said, deliberately, with the intense distinctiveness of scorn, that no one ever knew who your parents are. Mr. Vernon is not your father. He is not even a relative. He fished you out of this very creek that is running under our feet this minute, a little half-drowned waif, about six months old. He was sitting just beyond that turn, there, behind a clump of bushes, fishing, when you came sailing and bobbing past, in your long white clothes, and so fished you out, instead of a trout. Some person dropped you in the water by the bridge, but, by the time Mr. Vernon had you out, and had got the breath back in your strangled body, and ran up the path to see who had done the deed, the one who did it had escaped. I've heard my parents tell the whole story many a time—and Mr. Vernon, whose young wife and baby had died but a few months before, concluded to keep you and bring you up. Of course, we don't know what kind of a mother you had, but the inference from her probable attempt to murder her own child is "that she is not a mother you would want to know."

By the time that Miss Goldsborough had finished her cruel story, the delicate, wild-rose color had died out of her rival's cheeks and the great blue eyes were regarding her with a horrified look.

"Is this true?" Violet asked, with a pitiable tremble of the mouth, looking around upon the startled group whose silence gave consent.

"Why did no one ever tell me before?" she asked again; and then began to walk away as fast as her quivering feet would carry her.

"Don't go, dear Violet." "It was a burning shame of Florence to tell you." "You know it makes no difference to us!" were some of the exclamations which followed her, and two or three of the girls ran after her, and would have walked by her side, but Violet fled like a fawn who has heard the hunter, until outstripping the pace of the others, she found herself alone, going rapidly along the path beside the stream, while her companions took the road and sauntered on into the village.

Violet had but just gotten out of sight of the others, and was still flying along as if pursued, when she was met by a young man, with a fishing-rod on his shoulder, and a string of trout in one hand.

"Why, Miss Violet, what is the matter?" he asked, putting out his disengaged right hand to arrest her flight, and darting a keen look forward, as if he expected to see a mad dog, at the least, in pursuit.

"Nothing, nothing, Charlie! Let me go!"

"But you are as pale as death. Something is the matter, I know. If you are in any trouble you might tell me, I'm sure!"

Violet burst into tears.

"There! I knew something was wrong. And you won't tell me?" reproachfully. "Has any one dared to insult you, Miss Vernon?" asked the young gentleman, looking wrathfully up and down the path. "If he has, I'll kill him!"

"No, no; oh, no! It is something Florence Goldsborough said to me, Charlie. I am foolish to cry about it," and the girl sobbed more

violently than before. Charlie then threw down the rod, laid his trout in the grass, and getting hold of one of Violet's faintly-resisting hands drew her down to a seat beside him, on a moss-grown log near the path.

"Tell me all about it," he said, caressingly.

"I can not. I never can tell you! Oh, it was something dreadful, Charlie!" and the pink lips quivered, and the dark-blue eyes flashed for an instant through their showers of tears.

The young man immediately guessed what it was, for he was quite familiar with poor Violet's history; and he felt extremely vexed with Florence, knowing how assiduously Mr. Vernon had endeavored to keep from his adopted child the dubious story of her first appearance amid the gossips of Lycurgus. But he would not hint to the weeping girl by his side that he was aware of what had so wounded her; he patted her little hand gently, and, after a few minutes, drew out his white cambric handkerchief and made a half-comical attempt to wipe the glittering drops from the roses on her cheeks.

Violet laughed at this, hysterically; broke down into a dozen little sobs, rallied, brushed off her own tears this time, and finally looked, very forlornly, and very defiantly, straight before her at the golden streaks in the western sky.

Her companion sat quietly waiting for her to recover her composure, occasionally stealing a sidelong glance of admiration at the beautiful face which, despite the stain of tears on the flushed cheeks, looked all the more lovable for the storm which had passed over it—the tremble of the rose-bud mouth, the droop of the long lashes, the fire and dew in the sorrowful, resolute eyes.

Finally, seeing that she had grown comparatively calm, Charlie said: "I was going to your house to give the trout to Chloe, for Mr. Vernon's supper. I am afraid we shall be too late for that—but they will keep for his breakfast."

Violet rose instantly.

"Yes, it is time I was home. Papa will be uneasy about me. I don't want him to see that I have been crying, Charlie. He would ask me about it, and I could not tell him. Oh, Charlie, I shall never be the happy, careless girl I have been!"

"Do not say that, Violet. I hope you will continue to be very, very happy. You have at least one friend who will try to make you so."

Violet blushed under the meaning look with which this was said, pulling her broad-brimmed hat a little lower over her charming face; while Charlie picked up the string of "speckled beauties" and the fishing-rod, and the two set off at a quick pace on their return to the bridge, from whence they took the road leading into the village, and were soon passing along a pretty street, with elms on either side, and neat, vine-decked houses, standing back a little, with grass-plots and flower-beds in front.

Charles Clarence Ward was a law-student in Mr. Vernon's office—the only one the lawyer cared to take. Mr. Vernon was considered the ablest pleader and most thorough scholar in the county; once he had done a fine amount of business and promised to grow speedily rich, but Lycurgus, like so many New England towns, first came to a stand-still in its growth and then receded; so that to-day, and in the very prime of his powers, the lawyer found himself with far less to do than in the beginning of his career. He had a lovely home, and enjoyed every comfort; but his income was very moderate, and he had some ambitions for Violet which rendered him anxious to increase it.

Young Ward was the son of an old friend living in a neighboring town; he was a college-graduate, his father had a good deal of money, he was very good-looking, had something of a Bostonian air about him, brought with him from Cambridge fine prospects, fine health and fine spirits; altogether he was the young gentleman of Lycurgus, and the young ladies were all sad when he went home on his vacation.

He did not board with Mr. Vernon, but had

a standing invitation to take his Sunday dinner and tea with him, which he generally made use of. He was very fond of Violet—but whether only in a brotherly way, or a more tender one, was what the girls of Lycurgus would have liked to know.

Now, then, you have the secret of Florence Goldsborough's jealousy. It was not enough that Violet should win the prizes at school, and sing the sweetest in the choir, but she must set up claims to the undivided attentions of the only fellow in the village worth having. Florence never saw Violet and Charlie together—which was pretty often—that she did not feel a bitter heart-burning, not free from malice.

Mr. Goldsborough was the owner of the Lycurgus bank; believed to be wealthy, and owner of the only house in the place built in the modern style, with Mansard roof, and painted brown, and having a tower.

Florence had reached home half an hour before Charlie and Violet went quickly by, and was standing at the parlor-window, feeling ashamed of what she had said, and wishing she could take back her words; but when she saw those two go by together, she pressed her little white teeth into her scarlet under lip, and was no longer sorry.

"I wonder what he can see in her—a tall, gawky creature, as washed-out as a last summer's muslin!"

She looked after them with scornful eyes, as far as she could see them; then ran over to the great mirror at the back of the double parlor, to take a long look at her own elegant little figure, and dark, glowing face, with its small features and velvety-black eyes.

"I hate blondes!" she muttered to herself. "I am twice as handsome as she is, any day! Charlie Ward would not care for her if she was not forever hanging around him. He has an errand to the house every day, and is there every Sunday—of course, she makes the most of her opportunities! Never mind, Miss Violet! you won't have your own way altogether, if you do have the advantage of me! I'll never rest until I make a quarrel between you and Mr. Ward."

The great, velvety eyes had a wicked laugh in them, as she turned away from the flattering mirror. Florence was not a very bad person, generally; but she had strong, vivid feeling; and her selfishness and vanity had been fostered by indulgent relatives, who thought there never was another child like her. Never having been taught the hard lesson of self-control, she naturally gave way to whatever passion was aroused for the moment. She was growing into a woman, now; and was sometimes surprised at herself, when she found how impetuous, how even dangerous some of her fits of impulse and feeling were. If any one had a dress, or a jewel, surpassing her own, she was unhappy; if any one of her young companions was admired, or addressed with deference, she was jealous and invidious; all her feelings were proportionately strong and unreasoning; so that it would not take a prophet to foretell that much wretchedness, for herself and for others, lay close in the future.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

WHEN Violet reached home, after that unfortunate strawberry excursion, it was so near twilight that Mr. Vernon did not notice the traces of tears on his darling's face. Indeed, his own thoughts were pre-occupied. Tea was waiting, and the trout was deferred to breakfast; for, as aunt Chloe said, "Ef dar wus one t'ing wuss'n anudder to keep arter it wus ready to come out de oven, dat t'ing wus Sally Lunn."

"You mus' walk right in de dinin' room, honey, an' you, Massa Ward, an' done set right down, an' I'll bring in de Sally Lunn dis instum. Massa Vernon he in dar, now, a-readin' of his paper by de winder."

"Since you hurry me so, Chloe, I must wash my hands in your kitchen. Will you follow suit, Charlie?"

Aunt Chloe produced a snowy towel from a dresser-drawer, and "de children," as she called them, pumped water on each other's hands, and

had such a merry time of it, that Violet had almost forgotten her heavy heart, when they passed on into the dining room; but the first sight of her father called it back. Young Ward thought it very pleasant at Mr. Vernon's tea-table that evening; he did ample justice to the repast, for he had been fishing, and caught an appetite. A light breeze brought the odor of a thousand roses through the open windows, and the light of the lamps shone cheerfully over the polished silver and quaint old china.

He stole many a sly look at Violet, whose sweet face wore a most touching trace of sadness; yet was lovelier than usual with the soft flush on the cheeks and the wistful look in the eyes. When with Violet, Charlie always knew that he preferred her in his heart of hearts; but when he came into the witching presence of Florence Goldsborough he was sometimes tempted to believe that she was his favorite. The little brunette was irresistible when she made an effort to please, and there was no dark mystery surrounding her origin—and Charlie had a good degree of family pride. To-night he pitied and loved Violet; who, poor child, worshiped the ground he trod upon, without in the least understanding her own feelings, or ever having questioned them.

Mr. Vernon was pleasant, during tea, but seemed pre-occupied. When the meal was over the young people went into the parlor for some music, while he returned to the library to read his magazine. Charlie stayed only about an hour longer—just for a few songs—returning to the office for a little more reading of the law, before bed-time. After he had gone away, Violet—having mused a few moments over what she was about to venture—with a slow step and a drooping head, went toward the library, which lay on the other side of the hall, opposite the parlor. She stood in the door, hesitating. Her father had laid aside his book, and was reading and re-reading a letter. He sighed deeply, more than once; and after he had finally folded and returned it to a safe place in his pocket note-book, he leaned his head on his hand, and appeared lost in thought.

Violet supposed it must be about the new boarders.

"Poor papa!" she thought to herself, "he does not like the idea of these intruders any more than I do. I wonder why he takes them! I thought his income was quite sufficient for our modest needs."

Again Mr. Vernon sighed, while his head sunk lower.

"Papa is in sore trouble to-night. But I must speak to him! I cannot lay my head on my pillow until I know whether or not that was an infamous falsehood which Florence told me to-day."

She crept into the room so hesitatingly that at the last she might have retreated, but in her embarrassment she stumbled over a foot-stool, causing Mr. Vernon to start, and look around.

In an instant, acting upon impulse, she sunk down on the carpet at his feet, caught one of his hands, and resting her soft cheek on his knee, looked up piteously into his face.

"Father, is it true, this thing the girls tell me—that I am not your child?"

"Who has told you this?" was the stern inquiry.

"Oh, papa, is it true? Only answer me that."

Mr. Vernon leaned back in his chair with the air of one to whom a crisis, long dreaded, has come at last—bringing with it, after all, a certain relief, that the worst is over. He looked down very tenderly at the pleading, pallid, young face, and his hand, trembling a little, touched caressingly the lovely pale-gold hair.

"Supposing my little daughter was only an adopted daughter, would she be any the less my child on that account? Would she be any the less contented and happy? Have I failed in anything, little Violet, that a father should do or be, to make you discontented, now that some meddler has informed you of my misfortune in not being really your father? Remember, if it is a regret to you, it is a still greater regret to me. I only wish the blood in my veins did flow in yours, my darling!"

"Ah, how good you are, dear, dear papa!"

sobbed Violet. "A thousand, thousand times more to be loved and worshiped by me, to whom you have been so loving and so indulgent, than as if I had some claim to your affection. Do not think that I am discontented—or will be—dear father; only—only—the girls said such cruel, hateful things! Oh, you cannot think how it wounded me! They even said, dear papa, that it was believed my own true mother was a *murderess*!" Violet pressed her hand to her heart, as if she felt the sharp thrust of those wicked words again piercing like a sword.

A dark frown gathered on Mr. Vernon's usually benevolent face. He sat for a few moments in silent thought, his hand, meantime, gently stroking the bright hair that streamed over his knee.

Finally he aroused himself, and lifting the sweet, sad face between his hands, and earnestly scrutinizing it, he asked:

"Now that those malicious things have been said, and my little girl knows the worst, does she feel that she will be any more contented, or better satisfied, to know the whole truth about herself?—be it good or bad, remember!—the plain truth, whatever it may prove to be, and whatever the consequences of the knowledge may be to me and to her?"

"Why, papa, do you know the truth?"

"Answer me, first. Would you prefer to remain just as you now are, or to learn all that can be learned about your origin?"

It was now Violet's turn to take time for reflection.

It was fully five minutes before her answer came:

"Papa, after what has been said to me—after what I know is in every one's mind about me—I don't believe that I can ever again rest really content until I have found out more about my parentage, you understand—that it is not because of our relations to one another—yours and mine—but because people will always regard me in a certain light. Yes! I am certain I would prefer to hear the truth—however bad—than to be always brooding over possibilities. The worst—the *very worst*—can be no more bad than they make it out to be. Now, tell me, papa, have you learned anything at all about me since that day when you fished me out of the water?"

"Nothing," was the disappointing answer. "As far as I am concerned it can only be painful to me to take any steps to learn anything. I have always regarded you as a sweet and special gift of the Heavenly Father, to console me, in some measure, for the loss of my own darlings."

"Oh, papa, then I am content, too! Forget what I said a moment ago."

"No, no, my dear. Your head spoke then, not your heart. I feel that it will be as you say—you will be gnawed by secret suspense, by hope and fear—shadowed by an undeserved sense of shame. I wish to Heaven, my child, that I had it in my power to furnish you the information you crave! But I cannot—and all the advice I can give you, is to be brave and good, and to think as little as possible about the matter."

He kissed her even more tenderly than usual, as he dismissed her for the night. After she had crept from the room, he looked once more over the letter he held in his hand.

"How strange—how passing strange it would be," he murmured, "if this should prove to relate to something or some one connected with my little Violet's history! But, pshaw! how idle is such a thought! I do not see why it should have come into my head—or why it should linger there, as it does. I have had letters from unknown clients before this."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT AN EAVESDROPPER OVERHEARS.

VIOLET VERNON did not sing in church the following day; and Florence, who, by this time, was heartily ashamed of the attack she had made upon her, had no rival in the choir. On Monday Florence actually humbled herself to write and send an apology—partly because she

was very sorry and partly because she feared Charlie Ward would be offended with her. It was inconvenient not to be able to visit at Mr. Vernon's, where Charlie spent so much of his time.

On the evening of Monday she strolled out toward the bridge alone, just after sunset. Of summer dusks the bridge was much frequented by young and old; she hoped to meet Mr. Ward there, and perhaps "make up" with Violet, who had answered her note very sweetly and courteously, but a little coldly. There was no one on the bridge, however, when she reached it. She resolved to wait a little while—it was dull at home, and the summer evening tempting. Dusk came slowly on; but the western sky was still streaked with scarlet and gold, the zenith was a lovely purple, and the birds chirped as one by one they dropped into their nests.

She leaned over the railing, thinking of nothing in particular, amusing herself by dropping the petals from a bunch of roses which she held into the creek below and watching them as they were swept away, while she vaguely wished that Charlie Ward, at least, would chance that way.

Presently it grew quite dark, but Florence was not afraid. In that village it was considered not at all improper for young girls to run about alone; the moon was just wheeling up, a great golden globe, in the east; it was dull and stupid in the house—doubtless some one would soon happen along—and so she lingered on the bridge. She was standing quite in the shadow of a huge old chestnut that grew at one extremity of the bridge. A thousand times, when she was a romping child, had she, with her playmates, climbed that tree, by swinging on to the railing and from thence achieving a foothold on the first great branch which hung out over the stream.

Now, as she idled there, herself in shadow, but the road silvered by the increasing moonlight, whom should she see slowly approaching but her own father?—and with him a lady—a strange lady—whose presence, dress, manner, all aroused her strongest curiosity. Why should her father be walking at evening with this beautiful and richly-dressed woman? Florence's home-training had never been of the noblest; she was capable of unladylike actions, as we have seen. She thought of her old perch in the leafy boughs above her head; quickly as a squirrel could have done it, and as lightly, she sprang to the railing and from thence into the crotch made by the dividing trunk, and in a minute was snugly seated where she could see all that passed without herself being visible.

The couple came slowly on until they reached the middle of the bridge; here they paused, looking in every direction as if to be sure that they were secure from observation. Neither spoke for a moment. The lady drew a tiny watch from her bosom—Florence saw the moonlight sparkling on the diamonds which encircled it—and said, in a low, slow, cold, but exceedingly sweet voice:

"It is eight o'clock. I expected Mr. Vernon to meet us here at this hour."

"Vernon!" exclaimed Mr. Goldsborough, starting as if struck.

"Yes. He is my lawyer. He must hear all that passes between us two."

"Emilie, must I be humiliated by having a third person present at this interview?" Florence had never before heard her father speak in a tone of such passionate agitation. She was thoroughly alarmed at her own position, and would gladly have gotten out of it; but it was too late! She was more afraid to betray her presence than to remain concealed.

The lady untied the ribbons of her hat and removed it from her head as if the strings choked her; but she looked as calm as marble. Florence could see every feature of her pale, cold face, for she stood with the moon full upon it. It was the face of a woman no longer young, but still wonderfully beautiful, with a delicate, high-bred charm so rare in any part of the world. She spoke with a slight foreign accent; her features, her dress, had the same foreign air. Florence was fascinated; she could not remove her eager gaze from the stranger.

Who was this lovely lady, who seemed to her girlish imagination like one of those fair, proud countesses or duchesses of whom she had read in novels?—whose small fingers flashed with jeweled rings and who wore at her throat a cluster of superb diamonds—whose gems, silks and laces seemed so native to her that she thought no more of them than the factory girl does of her cotton gown.

"Emilie! Emilie!" pleaded this man whom Florence called her father, but who seemed suddenly to have been transformed into another and quite different person, "I did not expect this of you. I thought, from the tenor of your note, that I was to see you *alone*."

"I should be wanting in ordinary prudence to meet you alone, Ethan," replied the lady, glancing toward the village, from which direction another person could now be seen approaching. "The last time I met you *alone*, you made a nearly-successful attempt to MURDER me—and *our child*! The temptation is probably not less upon you now; but I do not propose to give you the opportunity. My lawyer must be witness to all that passes between us, this time. Here he comes."

The florid face of the banker turned a sickly yellow. Florence was so absorbed, so horrified, so filled with wonder, dread, suspense, that she leaned forward until the branch shook and rustled, and her own dark, startled, vivid face might have been seen peering out of its leafy screen, had any of the trio below chanced to look up—Mr. Vernon had now joined the group.

"Sir," said the lady to him, "I told you a part of my story this morning. I want you to hear what I have to say to this man—*my husband*, who has come to meet me at my request. Ethan Goldsborough"—turning to him and speaking in those slow, low, solemn tones that carried an icy conviction in their every accent—"it not unfrequently happens, in this world, that men, scoundrels at heart and vile of deed, wear the mask so well that for years their friends and neighbors never once see the Mephistophelean face behind it. You have worn your mask in comfort and security; you are a 'leading citizen,' a deacon of the church, a man who heads subscription-lists, a man severe and pitiless toward sinners—especially *poor sinners*—a man eminently respectable. The time has come—after sixteen years of patient waiting—when the woman—your own wife—whom you have so wronged, proposes to lift the mask from your features and allow your fellow-citizens to see you as you are. You cannot escape the exposure which threatens you. I have the proof of everything which I assert, in the shape of legal documents—except the attempt at willful murder, and that I can so nearly prove by circumstantial evidence that the fact will not be doubted, when taken in connection with the main story."

"Spare me, Emilie, spare me!" groaned the banker, abjectly. "Let this matter rest between us three, as it does now. What satisfaction can it be to you to ruin me—now, at my time of life?—a man in his forties—with a grown-up daughter! Spare me, for *her* sake—my child's sake! I used to think you loved me once, dear Emilie!—you are too fine a woman to betray such a low spirit of revenge! You are rich, comfortable, contented—far richer and more prosperous than I am. Oh, let me alone! Everything conspires to bless you. Your child is living—has grown up into a sweet, good, ladylike girl. Take her away with you—and leave me as I am. I have worked hard for my place here. Indeed, indeed, I have bitterly repented the injury I did you, Emilie, when I was young and inconsiderate. I have been living a pious life since those days. Do not be revengeful. Remember the old times, Emilie," he added, with an attempt to simulate tenderness which made Mr. Vernon blush for him.

The lady looked scornfully over him and into his evasive eyes, which fell before her clear, fiery glances.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she cried, as if to herself, "and I once loved this man! Adored the ground his foot spurned! hung upon his words!

was wretched when he frowned—in heaven when he smiled! Ah-h! but young demoiselles are fools—fools! But I loved you, as you say, in those days, Ethan Goldsborough—loved you well—well—when I consented to a private marriage—to become your wife in secret and keep our relation hidden from the kind eyes of my only true friend, my dear uncle. You believed me to be an heiress in those days, and you wanted to secure my hand and my interest in the large fortune and estates of the D'Eglantines. You made yourself certain, by private research, that I was the true heir—though another contested my claim—and then you hastened to marry me secretly, out of *pure love*, as I, fond fool, believed. Well, I was very, very happy with you—despite the gnawing uneasiness of feeling that my uncle should know all—for almost a year, Ethan! Why, what a child I was! Only a little over sixteen at last, when the cruel blow fell! The cruel, cruel blow that forever deprived me of faith in man, of hope, of happiness! My cousin Philip was pronounced the true heir, by the voice of the courts, and you were disappointed. You lost the stakes for which you had played so cunningly. In less than one week you were on your way back to America, your native country, after a brief interview with me—your wife—in which you heartlessly assured me that the marriage between us was not a legal one, and you would not hold me to it.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* *mon Dieu!* What did I not suffer during the year that followed!"—she clasped her hands, turning her pale face upward—"it is incredible that the human heart can bear such trouble and still beat on. You knew—villain! scoundrel!—before you left me—me, a poor, young, timid creature—that some time I would be a mother. You knew that I was your true and honorable wife. Yet you left me to bear the burden of sorrow and shame. I could not prove the story I told my uncle, for I could not tell him on what street was the church, nor who was the priest. He was very fond of me; but he doubted my word—every one doubted the word of poor Emilie in those days. My uncle sent me to the sheltering arms of the sisters. In their dull home the weary months dragged by, till our child was born. As soon as I could sit up, I began to embroider, and to sell my work for such small sums as it would bring. When our babe was three months old I escaped from the convent. I had a little jewelry with me, which I disposed of, and made my way to Havre, where a steamer was about to leave for New York.

"Worn with illness of mind and body, almost wild with despair, but kept from suicide by a fixed determination to prove my poor, innocent infant's rights to its father's name and care, I landed in the great American city, a stranger, friendless, and nearly destitute of money.

"I learned afterward how my husband had, meantime, been amusing himself. He had lost no time. On his way home to America he had made the acquaintance of another heiress, the daughter of a New York speculator in petroleum—a coarse-grained, ill-educated girl, with a certain sort of vulgar beauty—and this lady he had married within a month after their arrival in New York. Her father gave her a few thousand dollars, and her pretended husband—driven by the fear that his real wife might possibly take a fancy to follow him—persuaded her to come with him to this out-of-the-way New England town, where her wedding-portion enabled him to set up a banking-house and assume his natural position of eminent respectability!

"Here he hoped to enjoy his well-earned peace; but the meek, quiet, timid little wife, afraid of her own shadow, was unaccountably bold enough to trace and follow him; she, and her babe, appeared before him, one evening, in a startling manner.

"Do not groan so, now, Ethan—that was sixteen years ago! But you recall it all. Look at him, Mr. Vernon! Do you see his hand tremble, his lips turn white? No wonder! It is unpleasant to force his memory back to that time. I ought to spare him. God knows, as far as I alone am concerned, I would freely do it. But

justice bids me speak. *My child* cries to me, forbidding silence. Ay! guilty man, with the crime of attempted murder on your soul, I would spare you. But it must not be. As a *wife* and a *mother* I must assert my rights.

"I surprised him under the shadow of his own vine and fig-tree. In his dread of discovery, he told me a thousand lies, ending by appointing a meeting with me on the afternoon of the following day, in a lonely part of the woods not far above the bridge on which we stand. He swore to me that if I would meet him there, and talk over our affairs calmly, he would acknowledge me as his first and true wife, and return with me to France to assure my uncle of my innocence. Despite of the dreadful wrong he had done me, I still loved Ethan Goldsborough, and craved a reconciliation.

"He met me, in the lonely, hidden place in the woods which he had appointed. I held up to him our smiling babe, that should have touched the heart and the conscience of a demon.

"The place of our meeting was near the ruins of an old mill. Only the wheel and a few timbers remained; but the dam across the stream was there, and the pond above the dam was deep and still. He took our child in his arms, and, while I looked for him to caress it, suddenly, with a furious gesture, he whirled it far out and it dropped into the water of the pond. Then the cry which arose to my lips was choked in my throat—and I knew no more—for some time. I know, by the gleam in your eyes and the working of your lips, Ethan, that you are only wishing that your plan had not failed. But it *did* fail—despite of the stone which you tied to my feet before you threw me after my babe, all unconscious as I was, with the black marks of your wicked fingers about my throat!

"Doubtless you hurried away after the hideous deed, creeping back to town by devious ways, to resume your part of 'leading citizen.'

"The swiftness of the current swept me against the walls of the dam, and my poor feet became entangled in the timbers; the cold bath restored my senses, and I found myself being dashed back and forth, my stone-laden feet caught and held, but my face floating, and a jutting end of a sluice-board within reach of my arms. I seized the board and clung to it. I could quite easily have crawled out had it not been for the stone tied to my ankles. As it was, I succeeded, after exhausting struggles, in freeing my feet from the burden—I think the cord broke. After that it was not so hard to reach the timbers, and to make my way, inch by inch, back to the bank, over the moss-grown, slippery dam, covered six inches deep by swiftly-passing water. It was sunset when I reached the solid earth. I fainted, and when I again became conscious it was dark.

"I told you the particulars of the remainder of the story this morning, Mr. Vernon—how I crept back into the village, listened, crawled, hid, like some guilty thing, until I heard of the safety of my child, and then went back into the woods to sleep. How I hung about the town for days, never allowing myself to be seen, and living on the berries which I gathered in the fields, trying to make up my mind to leave my babe with the kind gentleman who had concluded to adopt it. I was at your kitchen window, several evenings, Mr. Vernon, and heard the colored woman telling various neighbors what you proposed to do for the little waif; I felt that you could care for her better than I could, and I finally left the country, resolved that Ethan Goldsborough should believe he had murdered me, until I could, sooner or later, return armed with such authority as would place him in my power, and restore my daughter to her rights. That time has been long—long, in coming. I have endured years of hope deferred. More than once, meantime, have I stolen, under cover of the night, into this village, and feasted my famished eyes on stolen glimpses of my child. For the last five years, however, I have been in France, fighting again over the contested heirship. At last, I have triumphed—not alone in securing the estates, which belonged from the

first rightly to me, but I visited every church in Paris, I made the acquaintance of every priest—and I found the church where my marriage was recorded, and I have the evidence of the priest who performed the ceremony, and of the clerk—and I have come here, at last, as your wife, Ethan Goldsborough, to rout the spurious wife from her title, and to take the crown of legitimacy from the brow of her daughter to place it on that of Violet Goldsborough's—where it belongs."

Florence, hidden in the tree above, heard the terrible words; she clung convulsively to the limb on which she was seated, but she shivered so, and was so icy cold, that she expected, every moment, to lose her hold, and go crashing down into the stream.

Ah! what wild, incredible story was this! How completely were the tables turned upon her, who had twitted Violet of her doubtful origin? Her heart swelled and knotted itself in her panting bosom until it seemed as if she should die.

Florence was extremely vain and ambitious. She had that same eager desire to be foremost—a leader—which had betrayed her father into crime. She had always been courted by the other girls; and was rather imperiously proud of her father's position in the village. The sudden ruin and disgrace which threatened him pierced to her very soul.

"Violet—my sister!" she thought, growing dizzy; but, with a violent effort she steadied herself and listened with intense interest and terror to what followed.

"You ought to remember, Emilie, that my wife is not to blame for anything which has happened," pleaded the father, in trembling tones. "You ought to have some mercy upon her! And on my daughter, too. As a mother you ought to sympathize with that poor child. Think of the blow it will be to her!"

"I think only of my own child," was the cold response. "My first duty is to her."

"It does come hard upon poor little Florence," said the kind voice of Mr. Vernon. "I have always liked the child—a merry, bright little maiden, as ever was. Madam, I wish there was some way to spare her feelings."

"I can think of but one, Mr. Vernon. I have no wish to be revengeful. The wrong that was done me was of a kind not to be repaired in this world—least of all by a harsh revenge. I would like to spare even the unfortunate lady who has so long believed herself this man's wife. As to their daughter, if I could help it, she should never learn how bad a man her father is. But my daughter's legitimacy must be established. I shall see that it is left with no shadow of a doubt upon it."

"I am willing to make this compromise. I would like to spend a few weeks in this village for my health. I will remain quietly at the hotel. Meantime, Mr. Goldsborough, if he desires, can close up his business and seek a new residence, and the *denouement* need not come until his family are removed and provided for. I take it for granted that the lady will desire to leave here, and that her daughter will go with the mother. Mr. Goldsborough must make liberal provision for them, which you must see, Mr. Vernon, is so secured to them that he cannot afterward trick them out of it."

"I further propose to very quietly seek a divorce from the husband who so many years ago deserted me; and then, of course, if Mr. Goldsborough desires to make the *amende honorable*, he will at once re-marry the lady who now deems herself his wife."

"Indeed, I might so arrange the divorce that the public need not know the truth, until this man was free to ratify his present marriage. When does the court of this county sit, Mr. Vernon?"

"In August, madam."

"Very well. I promise to say nothing, in public, until about that time; but I shall acquaint some one other party with the facts, so that my daughter will be protected, in case you and I should die suddenly, Mr. Vernon," and the lady shot a meaning glance at the banker, who bit his lips but said nothing in defense of himself. "Also, I must

make my sweet girl's acquaintance. Every hour is an age that keeps me from her, now that I am so near her. You may trust me not to betray to her that I am her mother, until the time is ripe. But I can feed my hungry heart on her looks and words—"

"And that is where my loss begins," said the lawyer, sadly.

Madame looked at him a moment inquiringly—the tears rushed out over her pale cheeks and her mouth trembled.

"Ah," she murmured, feelingly, "I am selfish—I forgot you, who have been a father and mother to my darling. The saints will reward you! God himself will not forget your good deeds. Think not that I will tear her from you at once. No, no! we will loosen the roots by degrees—I will stay here, in this far village, so that she can be near you—something! We will talk it over. You have the right to decide what we shall do. We will do nothing without your consent!" and she laid one small hand on his arm and looked up at him gratefully, so smilingly through her tears, that the sedate lawyer hardly knew whether he was most pleased or embarrassed.

"Will you tell my lawyer, in the morning, what conclusion you have come to? I do not propose to have another personal interview with you, sir," the lady then said to the banker.

Mr. Goldsborough nodded, unable to speak, and she took Mr. Vernon's arm and walked away.

For perhaps ten minutes the ruined man-of-the-world stood motionless where they had left him; then a sound, half-moan, half-curse, broke from his lips, and he stalked away, while his daughter crept from the old chestnut tree and dragged herself wearily home like a bird with a broken wing.

CHAPTER IV.

A VANISHING FIGURE.

THE sun shines as brightly on the stream that flows over a corpse as over a reed; the most dreadful tragedies are those that happen silently and leave no outward mark. A new pallor on some young face, a deeper wrinkle on an older one, or a thickening of gray in the changing hair, is often all the token given of ruined hopes, wrecked hearts, terrible earthquake outbursts of feeling which leave the soul scarred and seamed.

No one in the village, saving the four who were at the bridge that evening, knew anything of the little drama which had been acted there—three performers and one spectator.

The spectator was as hushed as death about the single scene in a lifelong tragedy, which she had chanced to witness.

Florence came down to breakfast the following morning looking a little pale and heavy-eyed, but when her mother noticed it, she gave her father a shifting glance, burst into one of her merry laughs, and began to prattle about some trifle, light as thistledown glistening in the blue air.

Her father was not, by nature, so quick-witted an actor as Florence—he appeared a little dull that morning—but he simulated an appetite which he did not possess, forced down his breakfast, kissed his wife and daughter as usual, when the ceremony was over, and strolled down to his bank.

Florence went up to her own room, shut and locked the door, and was sitting stonily out of the window, a strange, hard, rebellious expression on her small, dark face—the scarlet lips pressed tightly together, the black brows contracted, the usually sparkling, flashing, melting eyes glittering under them black as night, but curiously small and intense—when a servant tapped at the door to say that Miss Vernon was in the parlor and wished to speak with her a moment.

A mocking smile trembled on Florence's lips.

"Oh, how I hate her!" she murmured, and her little white teeth flashed savagely as she said it. "Fated to be rivals in everything! And I always to get the worst of it! It must not—shall not be!" and she sprang up from her chair and stamped on the floor. "I will pay her off yet! I will—I will! I will wring her heart as mine is wrung! And she my father's

child—my own half-sister! Oh, how strange, how dreary!"

Going to her mirror she gave herself a scrutinizing glance, as if she feared her thoughts might be written on her face; and the next moment flew down the stairs, and, with a gay "good-morning," gave the Judas kiss to Violet.

"Papa is waiting for me at the gate," said the caller, "so I dare not stay a minute. We are going to call on a lady at the hotel—a stranger, and client of papa's—and I just stopped to tell you that I want you to come to tea to-night—will you?" Ever generous and impulsive, Violet took this way to assure Florence that she had really forgiven her her cruel tauntings. "Be sure and come. It will be very entertaining," and then the two girls laughed, as girls will laugh, at they know not what, and Violet kissed her friend again, and hurried out to join her father.

"She is going to meet her own mother—and she does not dream of it!" thought Florence, looking after the slim figure, in its fresh morning muslins, with a deep interest. "Yes, I shall go there to tea, of course. I must play my part for a while yet. I wish I could be present at this romantic reunion which is about to take place. How Mr. Vernon must enjoy it!" and she laughed bitterly.

Florence's was no common character. She overflowed with vitality; the rich coloring of lip and cheek, the velvet smoothness of her skin, the luster and power of her splendid eyes, her whole vivid expression, told of life of the intensest kind. Her feelings were of the quickness and passionateness indicated by her temperament. Well-governed, subdued by conscience and religious aspiration, they would never bring her to harm. But hers was not a nature to bear trouble or disgrace meekly—the first she would find too tedious, the last she would seek compensation for in some desperate acts of her own. Self-restraint she had never been taught. However wrong a part he had acted toward others—known to be, in business, cold and calculating—a man whose inner life was quite different from its outward pretense—yet to his daughter Florence Mr. Goldsborough had been a fond, devoted father. She was perfect in his eyes. He had laughed at and applauded her baby-storms of rage; and he did so still, when, less often, she got into one of her passions. He had always told her how handsome she was—what a belle she would be, when grown into a young lady—and had encouraged her love of finery by buying for her everything she asked for. Nor had her mother been much more judicious. Poor, spoiled child! illy prepared to face the trouble about to come!

Mr. Vernon and Violet walked on in the direction of the hotel.

"Make yourself as pretty as possible, child—the lady may be critical, you know," he had said to her before starting.

So Violet, modest as her namesake, was dreading a little this visit to the wonderful French lady, who had, of course, seen so much of the world and would be so fastidious.

Madame D'Eglantine had taken the most expensive suite of rooms at the hotel; her maid waited upon her as if she were a princess in disguise, and all, consequently, were deeply impressed by the merits of the beautiful foreigner. One of the hotel waiters, with a most deferential air, showed the callers to madame's private parlor.

Violet could not be otherwise than graceful, and she was most shyly and charmingly so, when her father took her in and presented her to Madame D'Eglantine, who came quickly toward her, put her arms lightly about her and kissed her fair cheek.

"What winning manners!" thought the girl—"perhaps it is the way with all French ladies—they are said to be so demonstrative."

Her own slight confusion prevented her noticing the tears in madame's beautiful dark eyes, or any other of the signs of extreme agitation which she so soon controlled.

Madame D'Eglantine spoke English easily, with only a delicious little foreign accent that softened it and added a grace. She made the young lady sit by her, on a sofa, and chatted

on so pleasantly that Violet felt at her ease almost immediately; and as madame insisted on a prolonged call, Mr. Vernon excused himself for a half-hour, going to look after the affairs of his office, and then returned for his daughter.

Violet rose to go. Madame kissed her again, thanked her for her visit, and added:

"You must come to see me almost every day. I am very lonely here. I will try to repay your attentions by improving your French," with a smile. "You speak my language tolerably; but you will improve. We do all our gossiping in French, my dear."

"Oh, thank you—it will be a great privilege. But I did not need that temptation," rejoined Violet, prettily—and so the first meeting of mother and daughter terminated pleasantly, the latter going away delighted with Madame D'Eglantine, and without one thrill of intuition to warn her of the truth.

As for the lady, no sooner did the door close between her and her sweet child, than she pressed her hand to her heart, calling faintly for her maid, who came running from the adjoining room, and supported her mistress to the sofa.

"You saw her, Terese!—my own, own child! My dear daughter! Was she not sweet, good, charming? Ah, Terese, it is for this I have contrived to live through all these dragging years! For this that I fought, like a tiger, for my good name—that I would not die of sorrow, or even of shame—of loneliness, misery, suspense. For this that I contested my rights to my inheritance, and never abandoned them through the long struggle with my selfish relatives. And now, thank the good Father, I have an unspotted name to give my child—her father cannot spurn her from her right to his name; and I have a noble fortune and the prestige of my own old family name to bestow upon my darling! How happy it makes me that I have so much to give her! Ah, I repent my promise to that man, last night, that I would say nothing to the world until August. I should not have waited an hour—not one hour!—for have I not waited sixteen years? I cannot smother the mother-cry of my heart. I know, I feel, that the next time my darling comes to see me, I shall tell her all. She must know that I am her mother. She will love me, and be glad to have found me. Terese, do I look as happy as I feel? Why, I seem to myself to be the careless girl again that I was when he came to me, and turned the sunshine black for me! Everything is bright once more—give me joy, Terese!"

"I do, madame, with all my heart," responded the faithful maid, who had long been her mistress' most trusted confidante. "Your daughter is all, and more, than you could ask—so pure, so artless, madame, it does one good to be in her presence."

"That is true. It cannot hurt one to love a creature as good as she is," and the lady, her cheeks glowing like those of a girl of eighteen, her eyes shining through happy tears, fell into a smiling reverie.

Terese looked at her mistress affectionately, but would not disturb her by speaking until she came out of her dreamland.

"The gentleman who adopted her—madame must feel much gratitude to him! He is one in ten million!—and he is so modest about it, he presumes not at all."

"He is a gentleman, Terese, who would do honor to any society. He is too generous to demand my gratitude; but he knows that he has it. Ah, *ciel*! how different would my life have been had Fate thrown in my path a man like that in place of the villain whom I was too ignorant to comprehend! Brush my hair, please, Terese. I am nervous, after the excitement of the morning, and that will quiet me sooner than anything else."

The Frenchwoman smiled to herself as she went after the brush.

"Madame looks almost as young and quite as pretty as the child," she thought; and returning, she took down the lady's long bright hair, and brushed out its threads of gold gently and patiently, while madame sat lost in a half-smiling reverie.

Meantime, on her way home, Violet put her bright face in at the office door, and told Charlie that he must be sure and come to tea that afternoon, for Miss Florence Goldsborough was to be there.

"As if that would be any additional inducement to me!" answered Charlie, in a low voice—not intended for Mr. Vernon's ear—and with a meaning look which brought a touch of color and a faint smile to the young lady's face. "So you have forgiven your naughty little friend, already!" he added, reproachfully.

"Not until she asked forgiveness, Charlie."

"Oh, it's all right, then, I dare say. But I can't affirm that I admire Miss Florence's spiteful little ways, for all that."

Yet that evening, had you been at Mr. Vernon's tea-table, or in his parlor afterward, you would not have believed Mr. Ward had he again affirmed that he did not admire Florence Goldsborough—his whole manner would have contradicted such a statement; and Violet saw it with a silent, sharp pang, not so much of jealousy as of sorrow.

If Florence had been in a room full of brilliant people she could not have taken more trouble to be charming. She was gay to recklessness. Never had her eyes been so laughing, dazzling, glorious, changeful; her cheeks burned with too intense a red; neither of the others noticed the strange, quick, sidelong glance she occasionally darted at Violet.

"Why! it is ten o'clock! I did not dream it was so late!" she exclaimed, at last, pausing in the mad waltz she had been taking with Charlie about the parlors to the time of the music which Violet played for them. "Where is my hat? I shall be chided by mamma for staying out so long!"

She tied on her hat, with a most coquettish look at the young gentleman, who stood ready to wait upon her to her home.

"Good-by, Violet, my pet. Forget and forgive all my sins, won't you, little saint? Don't think anything bad about me, whatever others may say," saying this, a little incoherently, she kissed her hostess, took Charlie's arm, and went down the steps, in the full moonlight, flinging back such an arch, mocking, half-wicked, wholly-fascinating look that poor Violet stood staring after them, with aching heart, afraid to think of Charlie alone with the enchantress, walking under the wayside elms, with the moon's glamour on that bright, mocking face to make it more lovely and irresistible.

"She does not care for him—she is only flirting with him; but he cannot see that," Violet whispered to herself, watching them until their forms were lost down the tree-shadowed street.

Now that they were out in the magical, warm moonlight Florence did not seem to be in so much haste to get home; she herself proposed that they should prolong their walk; and she looked up at the sky with those great, soft, melting eyes, and then at Charlie, until she had him quite confused.

"Charlie," she said, very softly, as they finally approached her home, "I want you to do one little favor for me—make me one little promise—will you?"

"If it lies within my power," was the rash answer.

"Oh, it does! It's the merest trifle in the world. I want you to let me slip this ring on your finger," she said, drawing a quaint and valuable ring of opals and diamonds from her second finger and playfully putting it on the little finger of Charlie's left hand; "and now that it is on, I want you to promise me—on your word of honor as a gentleman—to wear it until I see you again."

"By which you mean until to-morrow," laughed Charlie.

"Do you promise to wear my ring until the next time we meet?"

"What shall be my reward for so serious an undertaking?"

He spoke in jest, for her manner was that of a frolicsome girl bent on some small piece of mischief; but that manner suddenly changed and she gave him a thrilling look as she answered in a solemn voice, as if entering into a compact:

"Whatever you ask, Charlie. You shall choose your reward."

"Then I promise to wear your ring until I see you again."

"Good. Now, one more stipulation: will you also promise not to tell *any one* that I asked you to wear it?"

She was smiling again, looking coaxingly up at him from under drooping lashes. What a beautiful girl she was! and how full of wit, fun and kittenish tricks! the young man thought, as he dallied with his answer just for the sake of prolonging the pleasure of having her coax him, and of watching the changing eyes and the little mouth curving from a smile into a pout.

"You shall not have the ring at all unless you promise both things, Mr. Ward."

"Ah! Well, I promise."

"There, now, it is a solemn compact—as solemn as if signed and sealed! You are to wear my ring—without telling any one how it came into your possession—until you see me again. And, Charlie, be very careful of it! Papa brought that ring from Paris when he was a young man; he had it laid away for years, but gave it to me on my sixteenth birthday, a month ago. It has more than a money value, though that is great. And now I must really go in the house. Good-by," and she held out her little hand, but snatched it away when he would have held it longer than was necessary, kissed it, airily, to him from the steps; and, the next instant, vanished in the darkness of her father's hall.

When certain that the witching vision had quite disappeared Charlie turned and walked toward his hotel, his hand burning at the touch of the ring which sparkled balefully in the moonlight, and his mind a chaos of images of dark curls and splendid eyes, of rash promises, a sweet, persuasive voice, a charming little figure, full of grace, kissing its hand to him.

"But how icy cold her hand was!" thought the student.

When Charlie awoke the next morning the first thing of which he became distinctly conscious was the ring, which was a little tight on his finger, and which flashed like a small rainbow when he raised his hand.

"It is a very conspicuous jewel," he thought, "I hope the little witch will reclaim it before night."

But "before night" it had become apparent to him that Florence Goldsborough intended him to wear her signet for some time.

Indeed, before noon, the whole village knew that Florence had run away from home; that she had left the house in the night and gone to the station, where she had taken the midnight express—which stopped at Lyeurgus for water—north.

Only her father knew, however, that she had taken with her a thousand dollars, which she had abstracted from the safe in his bedroom. Only her father had a suspicion of the real causes which had led her to this desperate action. A guilty conscience burned the truth into his heart.

Of course, Mr. Vernon had his conjectures that the girl might have learned something of the disclosures soon to be made; and, in her shame and anger at her father, been rash enough to fly from her friends. But he was not certain of it.

As the gossips said: "Florence was not like other girls—she had lots of good and bad in her—it was just like her to want to get up a sensation by some such trick!" and so, with others, looked for her speedy return.

Not so her wretched father. He felt that his child had made a desperate move in a desperate mood; he knew that he had lost her!

Nevertheless, he had telegrams sent to Portland, Boston and New York, instructing the detectives to look out for a young lady, and take the best care of her, if found, until her parents could reach her. He, himself, as soon as he believed a clue had been found, started out in search; but he came home, at the end of a week, without her, or any tidings of her.

"Ethan, do you think she has killed herself?" asked the unhappy mother.

"No, she is not one of that kind," was the moody reply.

It seemed, however, as if that little figure which Charlie had seen vanish out of the moonlight had disappeared from the face of the earth; so utterly was it lost; and the opal ring continued to glimmer and flash on the hand where it had been so artfully fastened.

CHAPTER V.

THE SPELL WROUGHT BY THE RING.

CHARLIE WARD felt a little ashamed of the ring which he wore when he found, as he did before the day was over, how many people recognized it as Florence Goldsborough's, and rallied him on having a knowledge of her whereabouts. Every one who saw the ring took it for granted that an engagement existed between him and the runaway girl. Long before night he would have thrown the costly bauble into the first rubbish-heap he came to had he not been bound by his promise.

Charlie was not so dull but that he comprehended that Florence had purposely entangled him; annoyed and surprised, only half-seeing through her purpose, he yet felt himself inexorably bound to keep his word. He had said, upon his word of honor, that he would wear the ring until he saw her again, and wear it he must. His embarrassment increased, when, late in the afternoon, Mr. Goldsborough called at the office, having heard some rumor of the jewel.

"You are wearing my daughter's ring?" the banker said, in a tremulous, eager voice—it seemed to Charlie that he had aged ten years since he saw him last.

"Yes," answered Ward, blushing to his eyes.

"Since when, may I ask?"

"Since last evening, Mr. Goldsborough."

"Did you know, last evening, that Florence was going away?"

"No, sir; I did not even suspect such a thing."

"Mr. Ward—you will excuse the question under the circumstances—are you and my daughter engaged?"

"Oh, no, sir; not at all. There has never been anything particular between us," stammered Charlie.

"Then, perhaps, you will not refuse to return her ring to me. It is a family jewel which I do not care to have in the possession of a stranger."

"Mr. Goldsborough, I am very sorry; but I am not at liberty to resign the ring to any one but Miss Florence."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the banker, with a sneer, "perhaps you are too well aware of its intrinsic value."

"Say what you please, sir; I am under a promise and I shall keep it. I only wish that I could honorably be rid of wearing the ring," he added, indignantly.

And the father went away with the very natural impression that young Ward, in spite of his denial, was or had been engaged to his daughter; but, since the step she had taken, wished to be free from the engagement.

"He should have returned the ring to me, and said so, like a man," he thought.

Charlie was very nervous indeed before the day was over. The interview with Mr. Goldsborough had been sufficiently embarrassing, yet there was another which he dreaded more.

What would Violet think when her eyes fell on the detested ring? For Charlie had been having some very serious thoughts during the day, being driven to reflection by the step which Florence had taken. All day, in his mind, he had been contrasting the two girls; and there was no longer any doubt in it as to which of the two he most admired—for the first time he said to his own heart: "I love Violet, and Violet only. There is none like her, none! How could I ever have thought of Florence in the same breath with her?"

The summer dusk was full of sweetness as he finally took the familiar path to Mr. Vernon's house. It was with a feeling of relief that he saw Violet's white dress glimmering on the piazza, where she was pacing back and forth

alone—waiting for him, Charlie thought, with a sudden, sweet, warm thrill of the heart; and he could walk and talk with her, and she would not see, in the evening dusk, the hateful circle that burned his finger.

"Oh, Charlie!" cried Violet, in her silver voice, coming half-way down the steps to meet him, "I thought you would never come! I have something wonderful, miraculous to tell you! Something you will be so glad and so surprised to hear! Guess!" and as the moon, which had long been brightening in the east, just then poured a golden radiance into the perfumed dark, its light fell on a lovely face all aglow with joy and excitement, ten times more beautiful than it had ever been before.

"Guess!" she repeated, "before you take another step!" and her eyes shone and her cheeks were flushed, and she stamped her little foot with an imperious air as new to her as it was becoming.

"Guess!" answered Charlie, laughing, "do you take me for a Yankee! Well, I guess that Florence has been found," and he glanced covertly at his left hand, hoping that it would prove his conjecture was true, and the wild girl had repented of her freak and returned.

"No," said Violet, almost petulantly, "it is nothing about her. It is something very, very, very important, indeed—to me!"

He looked at her more closely, fairly starting as a thought finally flashed over him.

"Violet, can it be that you have heard any thing about your parentage, to please you so?"

"Ah, I knew you would find out! Charlie, I don't care to go in, do you? Let us walk here on the piazza while I tell you something which papa says I may tell you, and you only."

She took his arm and they paced back and forth in the moonlight; her heart was so full that at first she could find no words; they had gone the length of the piazza twice, when she paused at the further end, and all in a glow of smiles and tears, sobbed out: "Charlie, I have found my mother! I have seen her—kissed her—she has held me in her arms this very day. Oh, Charlie, I am the happiest girl in the whole wide world!"

"You have found your mother!" repeated Charlie, quite sufficiently astonished, and conscious of a jealous pang even in the midst of his surprise. "And is she—do you—is she—"

"Yes, yes! She is everything adorable, Charlie. Oh, the loveliest, sweetest mother! Why, if the angels had sent her down in answer to my prayers and dreams she could not be more nearly what I have imagined! I seem already to have known her always! Charlie, you must see her to-morrow. She is at the hotel. Madame D'Eglantine, they call her—for oh, Charlie! she is a French lady! Isn't that strange?"

"What! the French lady, so rich and so elegant, with her maid and her carriage, the best rooms in the house, the landlord flattered to death to have her in his hotel, of whom I have heard so much in the last few days? Madame D'Eglantine your mother, Violet! Well, now, I shall look for the end of the world to come next!"

"You think she is too good for me?" asked the girl, with a pout of the rosy lip that was ravishingly pretty in Charlie's eyes.

"Violet, you know I should not think a queen too good to be your mother, but I am so astonished! It will take me days to realize it. Why has she come, now? Why did she never come before? You see, it is quite enough to puzzle one!"

"True; I have all those things to explain to you—only I don't half understand them yet, myself. However, papa says it is all right; and only in deference to the interests of another person, that he does not tell me all now. He says I shall know everything in a very few weeks. Meantime I am at liberty to share our secret with you; but you must breathe not a word of it until papa gives you permission. Oh, my beautiful mamma! I wanted to go and sleep in her arms to-night, but papa said that would make people talk; so I am obliged to deny myself her company. Have you seen her, Charlie? Is she not lovely? And now I must tell

you all the little I myself know," and clinging to his arm, while they resumed their promenade, she poured out the fullness of her heart into her lover's sympathetic ear.

Her lover! the words are written, for such Charlie Ward felt himself to be before he came in sight of the white-robed girl who awaited him on the piazza, and more and more every moment, as he watched the kindling eyes and heard the silver tones, and saw what a luster happiness added to that pure face.

It caused him a severe struggle with his own impulses not to catch the sweet story-teller to his bosom, and tell her how he loved her, in the same breath with his congratulations. She seemed almost to expect something of the kind, as they finally stood by the rose-wreathed railing, he uttering his warm good-wishes, with faltering voice that made her look down and idly pull to pieces the dewy flowers, while her fair face was fairer than a lily's in the moonlight, and her slim figure, in its soft white dress, palpitated visibly with joy and fear. Better would it have been for both, perhaps, had he yielded to the longing of his heart, and told Violet how dear she was to him.

But two reasons restrained the tender words which trembled on his lips. He felt that this was no time to win from his companion a promise to be his own; she would never suspect him of mercenary motives, but this new mother and Mr. Vernon might very properly question his right, under the circumstances, to speak to her before consulting them. They might say: "You were slow to make up your mind when the shadow of a dark doubt lay over the girl's origin, but now that you find her the inheritor of an ancient lineage and a princess' fortune, you are quick, indeed, to make up your mind that you love her!" Therefore, he felt that he had best keep silence, now, though every sweet look and appealing accent of the confiding girl made the task more difficult. Then, too, there was the ring of Florence Goldsborough! He must wear it, and he must not tell any one, even Violet, that he had been asked to wear it—duped into it, in fact, for some not evident purpose.

While Violet, all fair, and soft, and smiling, stood scattering over her white dress the pink petals of the perfumed flowers, and Charlie looked at her with his soul in his eyes, a sudden movement of his hand caused the ring to flash in the moonlight, and drew her glance to it. She caught his hand; he forced a laugh and attempted to draw it away—why is it, in such emergencies, people always do the very things they ought not and do not intend to do?—she held it, and turned the glittering diamonds and the one great, burning opal to the light.

"Charlie, this is Florence's ring!"

"Yes—and the worst of it is, I have promised to wear it until she returns."

Violet's clear eyes attempted to search those of her companion, but he looked away in affected carelessness. When she spoke again her voice was so changed that it startled him—low, cold, sad—and her sweet face was pale and dull:

"Do you know when she will return, Charlie? If so, you should give some clue to her distracted parents. Did she give you this, last night? I know she did, for I noticed it on her hand when she went away."

"She lent me this, last evening; but she did not tell me that she was going away. I know no more about her than you do, Violet. It was foolish of me to take her ring—you know how young people are always jesting—and neither of us meant anything serious by it."

"I suppose you will send it to her parents, then?"

"No," answered Charlie, desperately, feeling that he was being sacrificed to an unlucky promise, "I told Florence, upon my word and honor, I would wear it until I saw her again—and I must. When I said it, I did not dream that I should be in possession of the ring more than twenty-four hours. You believe me, do you not, Violet?"

"Certainly. I can not insult a friend of mine by doubting his word. And I have no reason to doubt yours, Charlie. Florence al-

ways favored you above all others," and then she began to talk of other matters—not brightly and blushing as she had been doing—with an air of reserve and weariness.

It was to poor Charlie as if the little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, which had sailed across the moon, had chilled the warm earth, and was destined to grow and grow until the heavens were blotted out. Violet shivered, as if she too had grown cold; he was forced to suggest that she had better go inside; she did not object, and so, he wished her a wistful good-night on the steps, and walked away, oppressed and sad.

Violet, who had said to herself an hour before that she was the happiest girl in the land, crept up to her room and threw herself on her bed, sick at heart, jealous, wretched. She had not dreamed there was such passionate emotion to be suffered as the love and despair which for the first time fevered her gentle nature.

"Either Charlie is a heartless trifler, and has deceived Florence as well as me, or there is something between those two!" she said to herself, over and over again.

If the subtle Florence—who had planned for precisely these effects—had poisoned her ring with one of the slow and dreadful, the surely fatal poisons of some oriental sorceress, she could hardly have made the wearer more restless under its pressure; or produced deeper distress in the loving nature of a rival.

Unhappy as the wanderer doubtless was, wherever hiding at that hour, uncertain of her own future, and bent on desperate attainments, her great black eyes would have burned with an evanescent flash of triumph could she have witnessed the parting of the lovers on that evening.

Down in the bottom of her turbulent soul she had vowed to have revenge on Violet for all the ills which had befallen herself, and behold! here was one of her purposes already taking shape and sitting, like a vampire, on the breast of her innocent rival.

But, at least, however miserable, one girl was safe at home, under the shelter of her adopted father's roof, while the other—who knows what dangers followed, like bloodhounds, the trail of the other, who had been so rash as to flee from the only safe refuge of girlhood, her mother's arms?

CHAPTER VI.

MASQUERADING—WITH A VENGEANCE.

A VERY curious adventure had Redmond Rhodes as he was returning to his residence—facing Gramercy Park, New York—about midnight on the night of the fourth of June. He had been to the Academy of Music, but a few streets below, to listen to Nillon, in Marguerite—there being a very brief season of summer opera, and he being passionately fond of music—and was passing up the brown-stone steps—guarded by stately lions—of his statelier house, when he stumbled over a prostrate figure lying half on the upper step and half on the threshold.

The figure could not have been there many minutes or it would have been observed by the policeman pacing his rounds, whose steps could now be heard, a few rods away. With an exclamation of mingled surprise and impatience—for Mr. Rhodes took it for granted that the prostrate woman was either intoxicated, or worse—he stooped, and drew her partially into a sitting posture, turning her face toward the moon, which shone down from over the trees in the park with a light like that of a softer day.

At the same time he rang the door-bell rather sharply, with the intention of telling James, his man, to speak to the officer and have the vagabond taken off to the station-house.

But by the time James had opened the door his master had changed his mind about sending for the policeman.

He had seen something very odd indeed when he turned the face, half-hidden in the depths of a gray silk Quaker bonnet, so that the moonbeams fell upon it. He had seen that the figure was scarcely larger than a child's, that the face was pale, the eyes closed, the woman or girl, or whatever she was, unconscious. He had no-

ticed that her dress was that of a neat old lady from the rural regions; probably, from the bonnet, and the prudish shawl pinned about the shoulders, a Quaker; but he had also observed a certain incongruity which had aroused his curiosity: a pair of spectacles had fallen from the closed eyes and a "front" of gray hair had become sadly disarranged, being quite pushed to one side by her fall, revealing an abundance of jetty ringlets that looked strangely out of place against the wrinkles plainly to be seen on the pallid forehead.

"James," said Mr. Rhodes, as his man opened the door and remained stupidly staring at the unexpected tableau on the steps, "help me to take in this poor old lady. She has fallen down and fainted away at my very door."

"She's most likely a vagrant," the careful James ventured to remonstrate; "adn't I best just call a' officer, sir?"

"She is no common tramp, James; I can see that. No, I think we ought to take her in, and make an effort to revive her—at once. She will die if she is neglected many minutes. See! she is too respectable for the station-house."

"Sure enough, sir, 'ere's her pocket-book a-dropped out o' er pocket; an' it seems stuffed full enough," cried the man, picking up a full wallet, as he bent over to assist in raising the woman.

"Perhaps she has arrived on a late train—thought she knew her way to a friend's house, but lost it, and became frightened and tired out. It would be a shame to neglect her. Lift her feet gently, James, and we will place her on the lounge in the library; is there a light there?"

"Yes, sir. My! what little bits o' feet, Mr. Rhodes! She isn't much of a weight, is she, sir?"

"Not much. Now, that is right—here! Run and close and lock the hall-door, James; and then bring me a spoon and a bottle of brandy or wine from the pantry. Quick! And wet a napkin in cold water, James, to lay on her forehead."

The man moved with the soft and steady rapidity of a well-trained servant, to obey these orders, while Mr. Rhodes took off the stiff Quaker bonnet, laid the head of the unconscious stranger low, so as to facilitate the return of the blood to the brain, felt the faint, almost suspended pulse, and vaguely wondered at the dimpled roundness of the little wrist, and at the mass of raven hair which came down when the bonnet was removed, and fell in a rippling tide on either side of the queer little brown, wrinkled face.

His vague wonder increased and grew positive when James brought the wet napkin, and his master, wiping the wrinkled brow with it, wiped every one of those wrinkles away! It did not take long, after that, for Mr. Rhodes to understand the false front and the black hair.

"Poor foolish child!" he muttered, to himself. "Some reckless or unfortunate girl in disguise! I'm afraid this masquerading will prove sorry work for her. It is well she fell into my hands! If that officer had discovered her, she would have figured in the police-court to-morrow."

While thinking this he was working also. He administered brandy in doses of a few drops, rubbed the slender wrists, bathed the smooth forehead; and, being a calm personage, of mature years and cold temperament, was not too flurried to notice critically, while doing these things, the exceeding grace of the trim little form, the velvet fineness of the skin, the extraordinary length of the black lashes which finally began to quiver as they rested on the ivory cheeks.

When a pair of dusky blue eyes suddenly flew wide open and fixed themselves inquiringly on his face, Redmond Rhodes thought to himself, not without displeasure:

"Here is a first-class adventure! I am afraid I have been rash; I am certain that this is an embarrassing situation! What is to follow, I wonder? Ah! the lady must have friends near at hand—she will give me their address—I will send James to take care of her—she will hasten to fly to them—and I shall be out of this awkward predicament."

Easier planned than executed, Mr. Redmond Rhodes!

Among all the staid and irreproachably-respectable citizens of the metropolis, there was none—not one!—who stood more calmly secure and above reproach than this wealthy bachelor, with his forty years, his quiet habits, his sumptuous income and his grim and stately mansion on Gramercy Park. Never, in all his dignified life, had he been guilty of an imprudence.

He had a clear conscience, now, as he sat by the lounge, bathing that fair forehead and giving those tiny doses of brandy; yet he felt that the situation was becoming awkward, especially after the dark, dreamy eyes had opened, and a silver voice, tremulous and sweetly-broken, had murmured:

"Father!"

"I am not your father, child," said Mr. Rhodes, a little hoarsely.

The great black eyes opened a little wider, the curved lips parted—for a moment there was silence on his part, speculation and returning memory on hers—with a gasp, a moan, she struggled into a sitting posture and clasped her two little hands together.

"Take this," ordered Mr. Rhodes, presenting a spoonful of liquor.

She swallowed it, and then her eyes glanced wildly about the beautiful, strange room and back to his anxious countenance.

"Are you a doctor?" she asked. "Where am I? Oh, what has happened to me?"

"Nothing very serious, I trust, my dear young lady. I found you, insensible, on my doorstep, on my return from the opera a few minutes ago."

"Oh, what will you think of me, sir?" she cried, putting her hand to her head to feel for the false front, and darting swift glances about her, at the Quaker bonnet, and at him.

"Nothing very bad; that is, if this is your first escapade, and you promise not to go out masquerading in this style again. Young ladies cannot be too prudent in their conduct—and you are very young, I should say," for a flush of shame was kindling in her cheeks, and as her color came back, with some of the glorious, liquid light to her large eyes, he saw more plainly how much of a girl she was—and what a pretty one! "It is fortunate for you that I discovered you before the policeman came around, or you would be brought up in court for this indiscretion. Now, give me the address of your friends, child; and my man shall go out for a carriage and take you home at once."

"I have no friends! I have no home!" she sobbed.

"How is this?" he demanded, sternly.

"At least, I could not go to them to-night, sir. They are far, far away. And I never will go back to them. No, no! I will throw myself into the river first. I cannot tell you all—only that I have run away from my home in disguise—not for any fault or sin of my own!—believe me, I was driven away by the sins of others!—and I came to this great city because I thought I could hide here more effectually than anywhere else. I had money, and I thought it would be easy to find a safe and respectable boarding-place. But they all wanted references, or would not take me because I was a woman, all alone; and it was after dark, and I grew afraid to go to any more houses; and so I walked and walked, and I was so tired and hungry and frightened that at last I knew I must go in somewhere, and I went where the houses looked safe and nice—and I suppose I fainted away as I was going to ring your door-bell, sir."

"You should have told your story to some police-officer. He would have found you a stopping-place. As it is, that step will have to be taken yet to-night. And here it is, one o'clock."

"Do not send me away with a strange officer, at this hour of the night," she begged, flinging herself at his feet before he could reach out a hand to prevent her. "I have gone through so much to-day. You seem kind; do let me stay here until morning. Where is your wife? Surely, she will pity me, and allow me to remain."

"But, my child, I have no wife. There's the difficulty. I would not think of permitting you

to leave my roof if it were proper for you to remain."

"Is there not one woman in this great house?" pleaded the young stranger, looking so child-like, so helpless, so bewitching, sad, irresistible, as she smiled up at him through her tears, that Mr. Rhodes felt how cruel it would be to drive her to the cold protection of the city authorities, and turning to James, said, in desperation:

"You must call up the housekeeper, James, and put this young lady in her charge. She will be cross, and, I fear, not very hospitable; but I will not send this girl away to-night."

"Certingly not, sir; you really couldn't, under the circumstances, sir; and so I will tell Mrs. Plimpton," answered the man, who had listened to every word, and had also been much affected by the sight of beauty in tears at his master's feet.

When the servant departed to summon the housekeeper Mr. Rhodes lifted the little figure to its proper place on the lounge.

"You must have some supper and go to bed," he said, very seriously. "I shall bid you good-night the moment Mrs. Plimpton appears."

"I am so sorry to make you so much trouble! I shall never, never forget your kindness in letting me stay here," was the murmured rejoinder, while two cold little hands caught one of his and a pair of rosy lips pressed on it a quick kiss of gratitude.

"You are too impulsive," said the wise man of forty, moving his chair to a safe distance from the demonstrative stranger. "Even our feelings of gratitude or kindness should be duly restrained. I can easily see how such a quick nature as yours, my child, may have gotten you into trouble. I know that you have been rash and willful—or you would not be here"—his sermon, perhaps, would have been longer had it not been interrupted by the appearance of a severe person, tall, angular, and sharp-visaged.

"Mrs. Plimpton," said the master of the house, rising, "you will oblige me by giving this young lady something to eat, and a room near your own. I found her, unconscious, on the steps; and cannot feel it to be my duty to send her to the station-house. She is a stranger, with no one in the city to whom she can go. You are a good Christian woman and member of the church, Mrs. Plimpton, and I am not afraid to leave her in your hands. I am going to retire, confident that you will see to her, as a sister woman. Perhaps she will tell you her story, and you can advise her in her difficulties. Good-night, mademoiselle," and the haughty Mr. Redmond Rhodes, the honor of whose acquaintance was vainly sought by many a wealthy society belle, bowed and smiled very benignly, as he went away, to the unknown little girl he had found on his doorstep.

Mrs. Plimpton dared not disobey the letter of her master's instructions, but she did the spirit. Ungraciously as possible she brought some cold chicken, a biscuit and glass of wine to the "little impostor," as in her own mind she dubbed one whom we know to be innocent of any guilt, if passionate and rash. The stranger choked down a few mouthfuls of food, drank the wine—for she still felt dizzy and sick—and followed with faltering steps where the housekeeper led, to a bedroom on the third floor.

"You can sleep here," said Mrs. Plimpton. "I'm across the hall—if you want me in the night, come and knock on my door. Here's your pocketbook; James picked it off the step. There seems to be some money in it; bolt your door; there may be burglars."

"Yes, ma'am, I will," said a meek voice.

"I'm so sorry you had to be aroused to attend to me. If I dared, ma'am—if you would not be offended—I would offer you some of this money, in return for the trouble I have made you."

"We, in this house, never take no presents," said the housekeeper, loftily. "But if you've got a good conscience, and have a mind to contribute your mite to my church, for a Sunday offering, I won't refuse it, as a Christian."

The little stranger drew out a five-dollar bill and thrust it eagerly into her hand, and Mrs.

Plimpton went to bed a trifle mollified, though still amazed at her master's folly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

CONJECTURE ran riot in the little New Hampshire village for weeks after the disappearance of Florence Goldsborough. It was evident to the dullest comprehension that something very strange was transpiring in the history of the Goldsborough family. Not long after her daughter's flight the mother went to some relatives of hers at New York, for a long visit. This was followed by the announcement that the banker had concluded to change his place of residence and was advertising for some man, with money, to buy out his banking business in Lycurgus. Such a person was found; and, on the first of August, Mr. Ethan Goldsborough retired from the bank, with a snug little fortune of seventy-five thousand dollars, and leaving his residence in the hands of an agent, to dispose of at the first opportunity, he bade a feeling adieu to his minister, his brother deacons, and all his long list of friends and flatterers, who expressed their deep regret at the loss of so excellent and substantial a citizen.

Nor had the voice of gossip been entirely silent with regard to the great and sudden intimacy which had sprung up between the Vernons and the French lady at the hotel.

Lycurgus was haunted by summer-boarders during "the season," and Madame D'Eglantine was not the only stylish, wealthy lady stopping at the Lycurgus House; but she was certainly the lion of the hotel and the village. A woman of such winning manners, great personal beauty, absolutely correct taste in dress, possessed of such rare jewels and reported to be the owner of old estates in her native country half as large as a small province, would naturally make a sensation in almost any community. In Lycurgus her every movement was noted by a phalanx of curious admirers.

It was said that the grave lawyer, so long devoted to the memory of his young wife who had died so shortly after their marriage, was wildly in love with the charming madam—or her estates—and encouraged a friendship between her and his pretty adopted daughter as an excuse for himself being often in her company.

Certain it was that after her second visit to Madame D'Eglantine—that visit during which the fetters which the yearning mother had placed on her own lips were unlocked, and her whole story, names excepted, poured in the ear of the astonished girl—Violet was daily, and for hours each day, in the French lady's society. Their affection for each other was apparent; yet, curiously enough, no one suspected the fact that Violet might have found her mother, at last.

Finally, on the sixth of August, the court sat in an adjacent county-town; and it was from there the story came, breaking over Lycurgus, like thunder out of a clear sky.

The French lady was Ethan Goldsborough's first and true wife; Violet was their child; and the lady had now applied for papers of separation which would allow him to do justice to the deceived woman who, for so many years, had regarded herself as his legal and only wife. All the details of the scandalous history, as they were revealed and proven in court, were seized upon and devoured by the hungry neighbors of the absconded banker. Well for him that he had taken himself away in time! So surely as he had dared public opinion by remaining, the fate of "old Floyd Oirson" would have been his—

"Tarred and feathered and carried in a cart."

His poor daughter Florence was now pitied, and the motives of her flight better understood.

"Poor child! poor, sensitive, petted child! She could not bear to show her innocent face among those who would so soon learn her father's infamy! Ah, where had she fled, poor young thing! Pray Heaven to keep her in the right path, and that her father's sins might not

drive her into deeper sin!" was the general tenor of the comments upon her case.

Lo! Mr. Vernon had good reason, with that complicity suit on his hands, to consult the beautiful stranger frequently; while the friendship between the two ladies was most fully explained! And so! Violet, the flower of the village, the favorite of young and old, was destined to be a great lady and a great heiress! And so! the good lawyer who had taken her, dripping, from Silver Creek, and brought her up as his own, was likely to receive a rich reward from the gratitude of the mother! How interesting! And every light and shade, every possibility and impossibility of the affair, was dwelt upon with lingering relish. Meantime, the case went into court so fortified by proofs already prepared, that in three days the long-trusted link was legally broken, and madame had received the right to assume her own family name, under which she was already known. And Violet Vernon was Violet D'Eglantine, by special permission—for she would not claim or bear her father's dishonored name—and, reluctant to desert the adopted father to whom she was far more tenderly bound than to her mother, had persuaded Madame D'Eglantine to become a visitor at Mr. Vernon's during the short period of her proposed further stay in the village.

Time fairly flew. To poor, weary, life-worn madam, his wings seemed made of thistle-down, glittering whitely and silently in the blue air, leaving no sign, making no noise. She was resting, and heavenly happy, after years of unquiet and misery.

But the middle of September came all too soon; when the measure of the idyl must be changed. Her plans, as far as she had made any, were to spend the winter in New York, keeping Violet with her, and to return to France the following summer.

Convinced of Mr. Vernon's strict integrity—unwilling to separate him entirely from Violet—anxious to repay some of her money obligations to him, she had offered him the agency of her estates at a salary quadrupling his modest income as a village lawyer. The offer had not yet been accepted; Mr. Vernon was a "creature of habit," and it was hard work to uproot his life from its native soil.

But the temptation was great in two ways; he knew that he should like the gain of a larger experience after the first effort was made; and his home could never again be really his home to him after the bright girl had deserted it who had so long been its sunshine. He saw and acknowledged that the retired village where she had hitherto grown like a wild blossom was no longer a suitable residence for a young lady with Violet's prospects. Destined to queenship, she must learn to rule. The art of trailing the courtly robe and wearing the insignia of rank must be acquired. She was her mother's girl, now. If the thought gave him many a keen pang it gave him also many a throb of proud delight. Violet would be a lady, lovely as the loveliest, proud and pure—stately, perhaps, as the years wore on—but always with a sweet charm of her own, like that of the moss in which the richest rose half-veils its peerless beauty.

The fifteenth of September, as we say, came all too quickly; the lawyer had not made up his mind; but when madam's baggage came down into the wide old hall, and among it one modest trunk with "V. V." painted on it, his doubts vanished in one sudden resolve.

"I shall join you in New York before the first of October," he said, when he came into the dinner-table. "That is settled!"

Violet jumped out of her chair and ran around to give him a hug.

"Cannot you go with us to-morrow, papa?"

"Impossible. Two weeks will be little enough time to close up my affairs here. I must find a tenant for the house—the books must be boxed—including those at the office—"

"Oh, papa, what will become of Charlie?" cried Violet, interrupting.

"He will have to place himself in some other lawyer's office, I suppose. Poor Charlie! he's very blue about our desertion of him. I told

him yesterday I was afraid I should yield to the temptation, and resign law in Lycurgus, with the brilliant prospect of a judgeship just before me!"

"Yet he has not been here for a week—Charlie has not," thought the beautiful girl, going back to her plate, slowly, with downcast eyes. "Oh, how cold, how distant he has been, lately! Blue! Papa need not flatter himself it is on our account! I do not wonder that he is blue, since he has learned all that wickedness of Florence's father"—Violet never could, for a single moment, then or thereafter, think or feel that Ethan Goldsborough was *her* father, also! "Perhaps he has had bad news from Florence herself. If he is low-spirited it is about *her*—not about *me*!" and the blinding tears rushed into her eyes, as they had got into a foolish habit of doing.

Very little dinner did Violet eat that day. Every mouthful was an effort. It was not only that Charlie had kept away so much, recently; but this was the *last day at home*, and, fond as she was of her new-found mother, eager to taste the joys of the world, her heart clung to home, and seemed breaking when she thought that she was leaving it forever.

As soon as the dinner was done with—they dined at two o'clock in that primitive village—she told her mother, who usually indulged in a *siesta* from three to four, that she was going out for a farewell stroll through her favorite haunts.

It was a glorious September day. The deep-blue sky fairly burned with intense luster. The morning had been cool in that mountainous region—frost, the night previous, had slyly loosened the forest leaves which it had painted, and, all day, like gorgeous, lazy butterflies, those leaves of scarlet, purple and crimson had slowly floated and settled down.

Violet took a path through the fields back of the house, which brought her out, sooner than the village street would have done, to the banks of Silver Creek, a short distance below the bridge, and on the edge of the woods. Far off the blue hills stood dimly against the more blue horizon; the stream, strewn with fallen leaves, sung dreamily, like a lady in love, to itself, between grassy banks, along one of which the path led on into the woods. The place was the frequent haunt of the villagers; not a shadow of fear, any more than as if she had been in her own garden, fell on Violet's mind, as she wandered along the well-known way, thinking of her brief past and her strange future—a dreaming girl on the verge of womanhood, and the sweetest picture ever seen between sunlight and shadow as she finally sat herself in a grapevine swing not far from the ruins of the old mill, where she and her mother had once been so near to meeting their doom.

As sweet a picture as painter, poet or lover could ask to see! The fair, fair face, half-drooped in reverie, the bright hair glistening and waving in the breeze, the slender, girlish figure, in its white dress, looking like a spirit's, so lightly poised in the swing—great bunches of purple grapes almost touching the golden head, and framing, with their green leaves and dark-red tendrils, the whole airy picture—the little, meekly-folded hands; the tiny, slippered feet—no wonder Charlie Ward, coming to the house five minutes too late and following in swift pursuit, paused long to look and love, adore and glorify.

But Charlie saw more than the girl's beauty add adorability; he saw the jewels flashing about the lily throat and on the little hands, placed there by a haughty mother, who had doubtless planned a splendid marriage, some day, for her beautiful daughter and heiress.

For young Ward, in addition to his other doubts and troubles, saw, or fancied he saw, that Madame D'Eglantine despised him—

"A youth, to fortune and to fame unknown," and sought quietly, without giving the affair the shape of words, to discourage a sentiment which she was resolved should never amount to anything serious. The mother discountenanced him—the daughter doubted him! Charlie stood, his heart in his eyes, the shadow of his trouble darkening his frank face, nervously

clutching his hat, which he had removed, the wayward woodland wind waving the light-brown curls on his almost boyish forehead—scarcely knowing whether to creep away without speaking the farewell which, at best, must be but a hollow, half-way expression of his feelings, or whether to risk all on one rash burst of love's young eloquence.

While he hesitated, two pearly tears gathered and fell on the face before him, and her lips parted in a low, soft cry:

"Charlie! Charlie!"

He knew that she was unaware of his presence—unaware, indeed, that she had spoken aloud—but her voice told him all; that she loved him, reproached him, wondered at his absence!

What did he care then for the mother's haughty smile of patronage, for the ring burning so wickedly on his hand!

"Violet," he answered, to her inmost thought, and starting, the tear-brimmed eyes met his; soul spoke to soul; no need of words of explanation. He held out his hand, and Violet, slowly slipping from the swing, whose purple clusters had kissed her golden head, came coyly forward and gave him her own. He drew her to him, and for the first time their hearts each felt the throbbing of the other, while the happiest moment possible to any human life—the first moment of knowing and feeling for the first time that we are beloved—fled swiftly over them. Oh, rapturous moment!

A thrill ran through the quiet woodland, the leaves whispered, the stream laughed softly, a bird high up in a scarlet maple burst into a trill of exultation.

Presently Violet, with cheeks colored like carnations, and a little sweet, shy laugh to hide her confusion, drew away from the arms pressing her too tenderly.

"You will let me take Florence's ring from your finger now, Charlie?" and she made a playful move to do so.

"That is the only thing you could have asked me which I would not do joyfully for you, Violet. Why did you think of that! There is a reason, which I am not at liberty to tell any one, why I must wear the ring until I see Florence. But it is not—Violet, I swear to you it is not because I have any interest in her, or that there ever was any understanding between us."

"You expect me to be satisfied with that, Charlie—and yet allow you to wear her ring and to have a secret about it?"

They were walking along the path now, toward the village. Violet was not suspicious by nature; but just in proportion to her love for the one by her side was her intense jealousy about the ring.

"I would like my Violet—if she is mine—to trust me!" said the lover, trying to take her hand as he spoke.

She folded her arms before her, looking at the path, not at him.

"If you cannot trust me in so little a matter, Violet, how can you confide your whole life and happiness to my keeping?"

"I have not promised to do that yet, Mr. Ward," she answered.

"Violet!" he spoke, almost sternly, stopping and standing before her so that she, too, was obliged to pause. "Do you love me?"

For a moment the soft, clear blue eyes were raised to his with a look he had never seen in them before; her lips trembled; but when she answered him her voice was steady and cold:

"You have no right to ask me that question as long as you wear another girl's ring. And I will not reply to it as long as you do."

"Very well, Violet. Let the subject be dropped between us, then. If you have no confidence in me, you can have no real love for me. I may as well bid you good-by here as anywhere. You leave in the morning, I believe. Good-by, and—and—a pleasant winter to you, Miss D'Eglantine."

The fiery pride which struggled with his love could not quite prevent the choking of his voice over the last words.

The next instant, Violet, who, without looking up, had just murmured, "Good-by," heard his step crackling over the underbrush, as he turned out of the path and struck into the woods without once looking back.

She remained rooted to the spot, believing that he could not really be gone. Yet she had driven him away. She had ended her own happiness—quarreled with Charlie!—and about what?

Ah, that dreadful ring! Was it not destined to be associated, in her family, with sorrow and tragedy? Her mother had noticed the ring on Charlie's hand, some time ago, and had declared it to be an heirloom of the D'Eglantines, and the very ring which Ethan, in their mad flight, unprovided with another, had married her with, and afterward basely robbed her of. Yes, her mother had asked Charlie to restore her ring to her, and he had politely, but firmly, declined! Yet he expected, under these strange circumstances, that she would be content to see him wear it, and demand no explanation.

But indignation could not make Violet less miserable. She stood there, angry, suspicious, jealous, yet in love all the same, vaguely hoping and expecting that Charlie would return and make some sufficient apology, and they would be happy again.

Five minutes passed. She *did* hear a step approaching, and then, perverse as her sex is sure to be under such circumstances, she would not turn—she would not yield an inch!

Then some one spoke to her, but it was not Charlie.

A voice which she only half recognized said:

"Will my daughter do me the first favor her father has ever asked of her—grant me a few minutes' interview?"

She wheeled about and stood face to face with—Mr. Goldsborough.

A strange, creeping chill of dislike ran through her when she heard herself addressed as his daughter. Her first impulse was to scream and run, but she conquered it.

"Come!" said he, and he *did* look ill and worn. "I am in trouble, and I want only to talk with you a little while. I did not care to venture in sight of those who know me. It would make scandal and excitement for nothing. Walk along the path with me a little way, while I give you the message which I wish you to take from me to your mother."

Very reluctantly she turned and walked with him.

And Lycurgus had another sensation that night. It was in a fair way to "sup full of horrors"—when the church-bells rung at nine o'clock that evening, and the news flew from mouth to mouth that Violet D'Eglantine had gone into the woods for a ramble and had not come out. All night the villagers, led by Charlie and Mr. Vernon—both of them nearly mad with anxiety—searched the grove, the pond, the stream, but found nothing.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BELLE PETITE AND THE DRAGON.

THE little adventuress awakened early in the strange room in which Mr. Rhodes' housekeeper had put her to sleep. Fatigue had given her some hours of sound repose, but the light steps of the first servant who descended from the attic to the regions below aroused her, and she had at least two hours for meditation before Mrs. Plimpton knocked at her door with word that it was time to rise.

In those two hours Florence Goldsborough did ages of hard thinking. She had a clear head, like her father, and something of his lack of moral principle. As yet she had never done anything really bad; she shrunk from wicked things with the sensitiveness of a young person reared in a strict and critical New England community; but she had little of that innate modesty which distinguishes many girls of her age; and none of that keen perception of the right which would prevent her from committing a thousand small deceptions and shams for the sake of accomplishing her wishes.

That she had plenty of energy and executive ability was proven by the success with which she had planned and carried out her flight from home.

Now, as she lay on her lace-ruffled pillow, her great, velvety eyes, soft as dark-purple violets after the dew of sleep, roving about the elegant chamber, drinking in, with a sense of luxurious delight, the details of its decoration and furniture, her busy mind ran over a thousand improbable plans for retaining the foothold she had secured in this house.

"I must stay here!" she said, over and over again; "I will stay here! He said he had no wife. What a proud man he is!—not handsome, but better than handsome—a perfect king! It's a revelation to poor, ignorant little me! I did not dream there were any such men! Yes, I am going to stay! I will stay!"

"Mrs. Plimpton don't like me. She will want to hurry me off—but I am not to go. Did not Josephine foresee that she was to be an empress when she was only a poor young girl? She believed in her destiny, and so do I, in mine! I have been wronged—wickedly, cruelly wronged. A girl whom I hate has my name and my rights; but I will triumph over them all; I will; *la belle petite* is not to be put down! She will live, thrive, triumph—she will be empress yet!"

La belle petite jumped softly out of bed and stole to the mirror.

"Providence has given me a gift which others cannot take away," she murmured, as she gazed at herself in the glass. "They may take my father, my name, my fortune—they cannot take my beauty! My beauty shall be to me what the sword of the warrior is to him—it shall conquer the world for me.

"Ah, yes, *la belle petite*, you are very beautiful—there's no denying that!" and she continued to gaze at her image lovingly, caressingly. "'My face is my fortune, kind sir, she said.' No pale, expressionless blonde, like *Viole*, could be as attractive as I am. A man might look forever into my eyes and he could never see to the bottom of them. How lustrous and large they are this morning! And what a color I have! I wonder if this Mr. Rhodes—forty years old, if he is a day!—ever saw eyelashes with such a curl to them as mine have! Eight o'clock!" looking at her tiny gold watch, which she drew from under her pillow, "and no signs of life in this house yet. They keep luxurious hours here. Hark! there is my friend, the housekeeper, now—coming to call me up. Yes, ma'am, I'm awake, and quite well, thank you. I'll be dressed in a few moments."

"I'll come for you in twenty minutes, Miss," said Mrs. Plimpton, on the other side of the door. "We will have our breakfast together."

"Oh!" breathed Florence to herself, more disappointed than she cared to acknowledge, "of course I am not to breakfast with his kingship. I seem to be regarded quite in the light of a beggar here. Suppose I should be dismissed, after the charity of the morning meal, and not see him again, at all! But I will see him!" added Miss Beauty, setting her little foot down, decidedly. "I must fight my own battles—I must help myself."

"What a shame that I have no other dress to put on," she sighed, as she regarded with disfavor the drab-silk garment which lay across a chair. Florence had obtained her disguises out of a chest of ancient costumes in the garret at home. "Lucky for me that I thought to put rose-colored ribbons in the pocket—they will go very well with the gray, after all."

She brushed out the purple-black hair into a thousand rippling tresses, pinned a little rose-colored bow in their midst; donned the Quaker dress—which fitted her trim little figure exactly, for she had once altered it to wear to a masquerade—placed another bow at the throat, assumed her watch and chain; the costly pink-coral earrings and necklace which had been her father's last gift, and which she had secreted in her bosom along with the most of her jewelry.

"There!" she ejaculated, almost satisfied, "I am sure I look as fresh as if I had not fainted at his door-step last night."

When Mrs. Plimpton came for the stranger, a lovely little lady, modest as a rose and self-possessed as a princess, opened the door of her chamber and flashed out upon her, she was fair-

ly surprised out of her severe expression of righteous condemnation.

"Well, I declare, Miss, you do look revived," she stammered.

"Call me Miss Golden, please," said Florence, who had already decided to assume that name, as having the initial engraved on her possessions, and as being a compromise with the truth. "Yes, thank you, I am quite recovered from my illness, thanks to your care, Mrs. Plimpton."

"It's a shame to make you eat here," the housekeeper remarked, as she led the way down to the servants' dining-room.

"Oh, I don't mind it, ma'am—not for once," murmured Florence. "I am too grateful to have been sheltered here, and protected by a nice, motherly person, like you, Mrs. Plimpton."

"Just so. It seemed to me more properer you should eat with me than alone with master. It wouldn't be just the thing, you see, Miss. He'll have his coffee about nine o'clock, in the breakfast-room overhead."

Florence was burning to ask a hundred questions about "the master;" but she was too wise to betray her curiosity about him. She felt, by instinct, that the moment she showed the dragon—as, in her mind, she had already dubbed Mrs. Plimpton—her interest in Mr. Rhodes she would excite her suspicions and shut off all further communications.

So she demurely ate her eggs and toast, and sipped her coffee, saying nothing at all but "ah," and "oh," and "indeed," yet before the meal was concluded she had learned that Mr. Redmond Rhodes owned the house in which he lived—was very rich—was in no business—led a retired life—did not care for ladies' society—was a highly-esteemed, solid citizen—and expected to leave New York, on the evening boat, for a few weeks' sojourn at Newport and other seaside resorts!

"Checkmated at the very beginning of the game!" thought little Florence.

"And now, my dear young lady, what do you propose to do?" asked the dragon, when they had finished and were lingering over the table.

Florence cast a sweet, innocent, appealing look out of her long-fringed eyes at the woman sitting grimly regarding her—clasped her pretty hands together, and said, sadly:

"Ah, Mrs. Plimpton, you advise me. I know so little of the world!"

"If you have a home the very best thing you can do is to return to it," was the decided answer. "You are too young—too good-looking—though I don't want to flatter you—to be wandering about like a lamb in a den o' lions."

"But—supposing I cannot go home? And from no fault of my own?"

"Do you know how to do any kind of work?" snapped the housekeeper, looking at the soft little hands and the pink-coral jewelry.

"No, indeed, Mrs. Plimpton. I am an only daughter—at least, I—I always thought I was, until lately; and *that's* what makes the trouble, you see—but I can't and I won't explain it,"—rather incoherently—"and the greatest pet, Mrs. Plimpton! Oh, I am spoiled, I know!—a poor, petted, vain, spoiled darling—good for nothing practical. My father is a rich man—not rich like Mr. Rhodes—but a respectable banker. He did something wrong; I could not bear the disgrace; I ran away. I will never—never—never go back—not if I die. I cannot work; but I have money to pay my board for a long time. Mrs. Plimpton I have just thought of something!"

"What is it, Miss?"

"If Mr. Rhodes is really going away this afternoon, why cannot I remain here with you until his return, or just before his return? I need not see him again at all—I can stay in my room all day. You might ask his permission. If he is so good and kind as he appeared last night he will make no objections. I will take one of the plainest rooms; and my meals with you; and reward you handsomely for all the trouble I am to you. I shall feel so safe with you—you can pass me off as your niece from the country, if you see fit. Then, probably, before Mr. Rhodes comes back you can place me with some acquaintance of yours—or—"

"Let us hope, before that, you will be among your own friends," interrupted Mrs. Plimpton. "I see no objections to keeping you, provided the master is willing. It'll be mighty lonesome for a young thing like you—nobody but me an' two servants."

"I shall be lonely wherever I am," was the answer, while the dark eyes filled and the little mouth quivered. "All I ask is to be under the care of a respectable, Christian woman. I got so frightened yesterday; I did not know, until then, what it is for a girl to be alone. And, Mrs. Plimpton, remember! I am a lady—and must be treated as one. I shall prefer to take my meals with you; but the servants must understand that I do it from choice."

"Oh, certainly, Miss; any one could tell at a glance you was a lady. You shall have your own room, an' the others shall treat you as if you was master's sister, as far as that goes. But, first, we must get his consent to your staying at all."

"I know that, dear Mrs. Plimpton. And now I will go to my room and remain there until Mr. Rhodes has breakfasted, and you tell me my fate. Is that the material for a cap, in your sewing-basket?—then, let me take it with me, and make it up for you. I will not spoil it; and I shall be so restless, with nothing to do."

She carried the basket off with her. Fate must have smiled on her maneuvers, for just before she came opposite a certain door on the first landing, on her way to the third floor, it opened, and Mr. Rhodes looked out on some errand of his own.

Notwithstanding his vivid recollection of the scene of the previous night, a flash of surprise and pleasure went over his sedate face as he saw the bright, pretty, blushing, shrinking little creature, who gave him a timid bow and hurried on as if anxious to escape his inquiring eyes. Why, what a marvelously-graceful little thing she was! And how young!—and how exceedingly pretty!

"It is well for her I saved her from the station-house!" he thought. "But, what follows?"

He was pondering the question when he went down to breakfast. He ate his meal like one half-asleep. Hardly had he passed into the library, afterward, when Mrs. Plimpton knocked and wanted to know if she could speak to him.

"Really," he said, when she had laid the stranger's proposition before him, "I feel quite relieved. I was wondering what we would do with her. We cannot avoid all responsibility in cases of this kind, however much we may wish to. If you, Mrs. Plimpton, are willing to assume the trouble of her I see no further objection."

"She won't be any trouble to speak of, sir. And thank you, sir."

"Stay. Perhaps I had better have a short talk with the young lady. She will have hard work to deceive me. If I decide that she is no impostor you may keep her in the house without distrust."

"It'll be very embarrassing for her to meet you, sir," said the wise dragon. "She'd rather not, I know; for she told me so."

"If she has a clear conscience she ought not to dread any one," said Mr. Redmond Rhodes. "If she shrinks from me it makes it the more imperative I should see her."

"That's only her modesty, as a young girl, sir. Very well; when shall I bring her to you, sir?"

"As soon as I have finished the morning paper; say in half an hour."

At the appointed time the housekeeper appeared with the fair adventuress. Mr. Rhodes arose from his chair, bowing courteously, and handed his visitor one by the table at which he had been staying; Mrs. Plimpton at a look from him retired. He retained the morning paper which he held in his hand, and, looking sharply into the velvety eyes that were timidly raised to his face, he said:

"Miss Goldsborough, if I am not mistaken?"

Florence sprung from her chair, turning pale and red and pale again.

He smiled, and handed her the paper, pointing out a paragraph among the personals.

"\$500 REWARD, for any information as to the whereabouts of my daughter Florence, aged sixteen, small of stature, dark eyes and hair, who left home on the night of the second of June, and is supposed to have gone to New York. Address

"ETHAN GOLDSBOROUGH, Banker,
"Lycurgus, New Hampshire."

"See! how easily I can earn five hundred dollars this morning! I have but to lock you in your room and step around to the telegraph-office," and he half-smiled.

"But you will not do it!" said the little girl, in a low voice, coming nearer to him, and fixing on him the full power of those splendid, winning eyes. "You will not do it, Mr. Rhodes."

"Why not?"

"A gentleman like you will not care for the reward—not take it. You have no right to inform on me, sir. It is true that I am not yet of age—a child, in the eyes of the law, subject to my parents—but I am not a child, really. I have judgment beyond my years; my father has forfeited all claims on my respect or obedience; I made up my mind to leave home on good grounds—ah, Mr. Rhodes, have mercy on me!—have a little confidence in me, as one able to judge for herself what she ought to do! You never had a sister, I am sure, or you would pity me."

She allowed two tears to brighten in her splendid eyes and gather slowly on the long-curved lashes, where they glittered for a moment, like diamonds, before they fell. Then, with a pretty, imperious action she dashed them from her peachy cheeks with her lace handkerchief, and smiled at him coaxingly, like a child begging for sweets.

"Tear out that advertisement, Mr. Rhodes, please; for if Mrs. Plimpton should see it I'm afraid the five hundred dollars would outweigh her friendship for me."

"Then I am not to telegraph to your father?"

"Oh, thank you, sir! You are an angel of generosity."

Well, certainly, it was pleasant to have it in his power to please and gratify this little creature. How her beautiful eyes kindled, and the scarlet threads came out in her dark, clear cheeks, and her whole expressive little figure and vivid, splendid little face breathed the gratitude and relief she felt!

"I hope I shall have no reason to regret yielding to your wishes—that you will be very prudent and careful, Miss Goldsborough. This is a censorious world; it will be easy for you to incur its frown."

"I shall not go out or come in—speak, smile, move—except as Mrs. Plimpton advises me. I'm quite certain, sir, the watch of the dragon will be sufficiently strict! Indeed, after the lesson of yesterday, I'm horribly afraid of everybody, Mr. Rhodes. All I want is to hide myself. And, speaking of hiding—of course the detectives will be looking for me now, in hopes of the reward. Don't you think this house, sir, is the very safest refuge for me in the whole city?"

"I do," was the answer, after some reflection—"that is, provided you remain inside of it, denying yourself all promenades."

"I will not put my foot out of doors for a month, Mr. Rhodes."

"You will be quite a prisoner this June weather. I am sorry for you. I give you the freedom of the house—the library, music-room, picture gallery, and so forth."

"Ten thousand thanks. May I trouble you to tell Mrs. Plimpton so?—you see, I do not wish her to think I presume."

"I will give her my orders on the subject. She shall treat you well. And now, good-morning, Miss—Goldsborough. I have some matters to attend to. Ah, Harold! how the deuce did you get in?—I did not hear you knock," and in spite of a self-possession called by acquaintances absolutely unassailable, a slight flush of embarrassment and chagrin rose in the face of Mr. Redmond Rhodes, as a dashing, foppish, brilliant-looking gentleman of about thirty entered the library unannounced,

and looked keenly from its master to the lovely little lady who blushed and fled from the room, not without throwing back a girlish, sparkling glance at the new-comer.

"James admitted me by the usual means, Redmond. But I must beg twenty pardons for walking in here without warning. You see, I never suspected—I did not know—you of all men! Ha! ha! ha! But I do not blame you. I shall never forget those eyes!—melted diamonds—night and fire—how they flashed!"

"You oblige me to explain," said Rhodes, stiffly.

CHAPTER IX.

RED ROSES AND STOLEN SWEETS.

IN every large city there are a few men like Fraser Harold: imperfect products of over-civilization, one might say. Sons of rich fathers, indulged from the drawing of their first breath, pampered in every way, they grow up with nothing to do but to amuse themselves. There is very little of the tough fiber of manhood in their make-up. Pleasure is their pursuit, not their recreation, and as such, frequently becomes such hard work, that they let even that go, and sink back into utter supineness.

Fraser Harold had more brains than some of his class; he had considerable taste for art, and sometimes read a book or so, and could talk about it. He had fastened himself, as it were, on his neighbor, Mr. Rhodes, as a vine fastens on a pillar.

Whenever he was ennuied to death of his lady friends, his club, his horses, his yacht, his pedestrianism, his cravats, he would run in upon Redmond Rhodes, to talk about "pictures and things." In this way a sort of friendship had grown up between the two men, arising out of their very unlikeness.

Fraser admired the dignity and integrity of his calm neighbor; who, in return, half envied him his airs of easy arrogance and his hundred little graceful ways of appearing brilliant on small capital.

The Harold mansion joined that of Mr. Rhodes—was another one of those ample, luxurious twenty-five feet front houses, inside of which goes on, in our magnificent metropolis, such lavish, superb living. Fraser had two sisters, both younger than himself, and both married—one lived with her husband in her father's house along with Fraser and the parents. This sister was always selecting pretty girls, out of the best society, for her brother to marry, and he was always declaring that a married life was not, to his mind. When men get to be thirty, with the club habits and principles of Fraser Harold, they are not apt to exchange their brilliant freedom for the monotony of wedlock—especially as their vanity is generally satiated by the knowledge that they can have their choice of the proudest, purest, most accomplished girls, if they will only ask for a wife out of the number.

Fraser went away from his farewell morning call on his friend with a thought working more actively than usual in his indolent brain. Redmond, foolishly sensitive as to what might be inferred by the presence of a young and beautiful girl in his house, had indiscreetly confided to him, under his promise not to divulge the facts, the story of the little refugee, and that he had consented to allow her to remain under his housekeeper's protection during his absence. A dozen times during the day Fraser laughed to himself over the artless way in which Redmond had told him the story.

"But the child's as safe with him as she would be with her mother. I never saw such a fellow as Redmond is! The soul of honor—and as unsuspecting of others as he is himself immaculate. Ten to one that bright-eyed little beauty is an adventuress! He would never find it out, if she were! I do think, as his friend, I ought to look into the matter! I could find out, in half an hour, whether she were really a rural maiden in distress or an artful little humbug, who knew all about Mr. Redmond Rhodes before she fainted on his door-step. I must contrive to have an interview with her! Lucky for him that I don't leave the city as soon as he does! And lucky

for me that this little episode will help to fill up the time, until I join Redmond in Newport."

Mr. Harold, senior, had been stricken down, some weeks previously, by a slight attack of something resembling incipient paralysis, and this melancholy accident was detaining the family in town beyond the customary time. Fraser had resolved—his father now being able to sit up, and indeed, to hopple about his room—that the other members of the household were sufficient to remain in waiting; and had expected to start off in a day or two; now he meekly resolved to attend dutifully upon his parent, another week, and do what he could meantime, for the interest of his absent friend. Unselfish kindness!

The only thing he could think of on the day following Mr. Rhodes' departure, was to walk up and down in front of the house a few times.

"If she is a flirt," he said to himself, "she will contrive to let me know that she observe me."

Poor Florence! time did pass wearily, monotonously enough, as soon as the excitement of Mr. Rhodes' departure was over. She spent the first evening in reading a novel; but novels were not too plenty in the solid library of the house, nor was she found of any other class of reading.

"Oh, how shall I ever endure six weeks of this!" she sighed to herself, as she walked aimlessly about, peeping out through the closed blind, first of one window, then of another. "If I could even fling the shutters wide open—or walk in that park—or go out shopping! But no, I must even trust Mrs. Plimpton's taste to select the material for a dress or two! I dare say I shall see a sky-blue muslin, or a *de bege* in big plaids, when the package comes home. Oh, dear, dear, dear! who is that walking by the house so often? What a handsome—what an elegant creature! Oh, I recollect now! it is the gentleman who came into the library as I was going out of it, yesterday morning. He is looking for me!" and she clapped her hands, gleefully, while the color rushed over her triumphant face. "He need not deny it. He is looking hard at the drawing-room windows! I wonder if Mr. Rhodes could have told him anything about me? I suppose he did, and the gentleman is naturally interested. Oh, dear! what a splendid joke! 'My face is my fortune, kind sir, she said,' trilled the slender maiden, in a low voice, full of suppressed excitement, and she whirled up to one of the sumptuous mirrors lining the great room, and took another long, fond look at the pretty, flying figure and glowing face, which, dim as the light was, laughed out at her like a sunbeam.

All her weariness was gone in a moment. She had not the least thought of anything wrong, for she was dangerously ignorant for one so willful and so unprotected, but she immediately determined that the gentleman should not be entirely disappointed.

"If he comes by again, he shall know that I have noticed him," thought the foolish child, happy to be admired. "I must have made quite an impression on him, in the half-a-minute before I got out of the room. And he is so splendid! Even Mr. Rhodes is not so perfect. Poor Charlie Ward! I can afford to laugh at you, since I have had the opportunity for comparison. Ah, here he comes again! I will move the slats just a little—not enough for him to see me, but to let him know that I am here."

Fraser Harold, walking deliberately by for the eighth time, had a glimpse of a tiny white hand turning the slats of the shutters; instantly his fine cambric handkerchief went to his lips, he passed on, returning no more during that day or evening.

The following morning, about ten o'clock, the door-bell having rung, Mrs. Plimpton herself attended the summons—James had gone with his master—only the chambermaid and the cook's assistant were in the house, besides herself, the cook having gone to Long Branch, either to enjoy the sea-air, or to hire out at extra wages during the period of Mr. Rhodes' absence. On the door-step stood Mr. Fraser.

pleasant and polite as ever—a book in his hand.

"Mrs. Plimpton, if you will allow me, I will step into the library a moment and return this volume—which I borrowed of Mr. Rhodes—to its place. He is particular about his books; I don't like to have the responsibility of it all summer—it might go astray."

"Certainly, Mr. Harold; very true. But I'll take it in myself, and save you the trouble."

"Not the least trouble in the world!" brushing by her and hurrying on into the library; there was no one in it; but he was not discouraged by this.

Laying the book on the table, he dropped his handkerchief on it, and came out instantly, bowed slightly to the housekeeper, and ran lightly down the steps.

Hardly had the door closed before Florence flew down from the upper regions.

"I had such a fright!" she said, pressing her hand to her heart. "I thought Mr. Rhodes had returned, and I would have to leave you, Mrs. Plimpton."

"It was only a friend of his, next door, returning a book."

"Oh!" and Florence, after watching the dragon, dusting the drawing-room *bric-a-brac* with an old white-silk handkerchief, for a few moments, slipped into the library, on the other side of the hall.

Her quick eye saw the handkerchief at once; she took up the book and shook it—a note dropped out. This she hid in her pocket, left the book and handkerchief as they were, and made her way to her own room. The perfumed billet was written in French, so that the dragon, if she had fallen upon it, would not have been any the wiser. Florence was a coquette by nature; her eyes sparkled, as with a little hesitation, she made out the contents of the note:

"*MADemoiselle*:—My friend Rhodes—one of the noblest fellows who ever lived!—has told me all about you. I know that it would please him if I could do anything, in his absence, to make your imprisonment less tedious. I know, too, the difficulties.

"You must not be talked about; nor must Mrs. Plimpton be offended. If I could coax her to allow you to slip out and come to our house to see my sister, your secret would be safe with us, and my sister would be very kind to you. At present, perhaps we had best not venture so much. I have thought of something. To-night Mrs. Plimpton will attend the weekly prayer-meeting of her church; it is likely her servants will take the opportunity to do a little visiting on their own account.

"May I call on you? I know how you must suffer from your imprisonment, and I would bring my sister; but she happens to have an engagement. If you admit me, I promise to make a very brief call—say twenty minutes! For fear Mrs. Plimpton may ask you to go to church, you might complain of headache! If you knew how much Mr. Rhodes thinks of me, you would have no hesitation in accepting my offer of friendship, made half from compassion for your loneliness and half from the selfish wish to do myself a pleasure.

"Your neighbor and friend, F. H. P. S.—There are some red roses on the library window-sill. If I may come, display one of those roses on the window-sill."

Alas, poor little foolish Florence! Nothing had ever so flattered her vanity as that note. Her cheeks burned and her heart beat all day; she was quite happy, and went about humming snatches of song, restless as some brilliant tropical bird. Mrs. Plimpton was coaxed to go out and purchase for her a ready-made white dress, on the plea that the Quaker silk was too warm, in that weather.

"And bring me some fresh flowers, please, Mrs. Plimpton. They are all I can have of the summer weather, while I am so shut up."

Florence came down to tea, in the white dress and the fresh blossoms; the housekeeper thought she might venture out to church, by wearing her Quaker bonnet; but the young lady feared to risk it.

"I shall not be at all lonely, Mrs. Plimpton, thank you. I will sit in the library with a book I am reading."

It was not until tea was over, and the long summer twilight made the signal almost undistinguishable, that her trembling fingers got courage to hang the red rose on the sill of a drawing-room window.

The pious housekeeper went off to her pray-

er-meeting; the two girls stole out the basement-door for a little visit to their friends; Florence had the library well-lighted, and felt quite satisfied with her own appearance; the white, soft dress became her dark beauty more than any other; the carnations in her purple hair and on her bosom were the very color of her pink corals. She had not one idea that what she was doing was dangerous. Born and bred with the belief that her beauty was to bring her all the gifts of Cinderella's godmother—a golden coach, and a prince, among them—she looked on the advances of this brilliant stranger as the natural, inevitable result of her own supreme attractions.

Fraser Harold was too familiar with every leaf of woman's heart not to perceive this, as the piquant little beauty received him with a gracious, proud air, as if she were a princess who had condescended to be amused by one of her retinue. The dark, bewitching eyes were fearless, clear and pure; the little girl was a lady who would resent the first appearance of a liberty. Ignorant she was, indeed, laughably so, of some of the formalities of city life; coquettish, too—charmingly vain and coquettish—but innocent of evil intent or suspicions. Her *naïvete* was something delicious to the wisest man of the club. Yet he could not divest himself of a feeling of respect for the girl, who was walking straight over a narrow and rotten plank, as if it was the gayest and safest promenade in the world!

"Your twenty minutes are up," said Florence, consulting her tiny watch with a grave air that made her unutterably charming. "You must go now, Mr. Harold. I am ever so much obliged to you for taking so much trouble to entertain me. I wish your sister had come with you. I know I shall like her if she is—" here she came to a sudden stop, blushing delightfully.

"At all like her brother," you were going to say—were you not? Thank you. I wish I could make it seem right to Mrs. Plimpton for me to call every evening; but I know she will not allow it."

"I call her the dragon," responded Florence, laughing.

"Good! I shall have no other name for her from this time forward."

"But you must go, Mr. Harold."

"I know it, I wish I was not so certain of it. When shall we meet again. There is a key to the park gate in this house. I believe the dragon would let you walk in the park every evening a half-hour for your health."

"She would offer to go with me."

"She would get tired of it, after a trial—the night-air will give her rheumatism—and after that she will let you go alone."

"I will see, Mr. Harold, what can be done. You might bring your sister to the park."

"Oh, of course!" hastily. "I'll arrange that," and he held out his hand.

Florence shook her head, and her girlish laugh rippled through the room.

"I don't know you well enough to shake hands with you yet."

"Then I can only hope that our acquaintance will improve," and he bowed respectfully and went cautiously away.

But when Florence met him in the park, opposite the house, two evenings later, his sister still had engagements, and they walked about together for a delicious hour under the kindling stars and the murmurous, shadowy trees. Fraser was fascinated by his companion; she was so unlike any other girl. But he was not in love; he had none of those plans of marriage which the childish little thing who clung to his arm had already begun to build in the airy future; he had no conscience as to the consequences to her of his sweet, flattering, *sub rosa* attentions. What he sought—with the pitiless persistency of a Sybarite—was a passing amusement; but for her—already her past life was an idle dream, without meaning; she had never lived till now! How poor, pale and faded was her school-girl life in that dull New England village! How different was this revelation of what was possible—as soon turn back, after one's foot is set in Paradise, to the dull,

plowed fields of earth. Even her vague resolves to be avenged on Violet, through Charlie, were obliterated in the intense glow of her present experience. And Fraser Harold knew that he had secured her heart, and that the fluttering captive was in his power.

CHAPTER X. PERSONALS.

PALE as a statue of Despair sat Madame D'Eglantine on that sunny September morning which should have witnessed her and her daughter's departure for New York. A few fleeting weeks of more than mortal happiness had been hers, after seventeen weary years of strife with a world that seemed to league all its forces against her; and now the battle was to be fought over! Peace, the white dove, had flown afar—all was doubt, distress, turmoil, while at her mother's heart tugged a heavy anguish worse to feel than any trouble for herself had ever been.

She sat in one of the deep windows of the old-fashioned parlor, a letter, which young Ward had brought in from the post-office a few moments previously, lying in her lap, her head drooped, her hands hanging idly, her eyes on the floor.

Mr. Vernon was striding up and down the length of the room, evidently laboring under intense excitement. He was pale, too; and a dark frown made stern his usually placid countenance. Charlie stood by a table, his hat in his hand, as if about to go; yet he lingered, wistfully regarding the blanched face of the lady by the window.

The letter which had caused her pallor was in a handwriting familiar to all of them and ran on something in this fashion:

"EMILIE:

"You may be satisfied with your revenge upon one who wronged you, but I am not. Unluckily, revenge, however natural, is likely to punish the innocent along with the guilty. I do not complain of anything you have done to me. Yet—I wonder, will you sleep any the more soundly when I tell you that my wife is dead—died one week ago, and was buried, without my once having seen her—died of the disgrace you inflicted, with pitiless justice, upon her—and her child!—of grief for the step that child took in running from us to hide herself from the trouble about to descend. An innocent woman is dead—an innocent woman revenged! I wish you joy.

"But, madame, you ought to know me too well, to rest as secure as you appear to have rested, in your work. When I found that the one creature on earth I ever really loved—my girl, Florence—had fled from me as if I were a tiger, it did not improve the natural sweetness of my disposition. I allowed you to have your own way—since I had no means of preventing it. All the time I was arranging the details of a counterplot, the execution of which would cause you some of the same kind of annoyance you have seen fit to inflict upon me. As my dearest daughter has left me, I must console myself with the society of the other one—who never was a favorite of mine.

"Your lawyer, acute and learned as my friend Vernon undoubtedly is, forgot to petition that you should be decreed the care of our child! Very likely it now occurred to him that I would dispute your right! But I do dispute it. Until she is of age—or for about seventeen months yet—I am her legal owner. You will now petition, of course; but long before you can receive your decree I shall be out of the country. In fact, our passage-tickets are purchased, and we are, this moment, on our way to a certain steamer which will convey us beyond the reach of any claims, made by the law upon my person, or for the custody of our child.

"I shall leave an agent at No. 40, — Buildings, New York, who will receive and forward any money you may desire to contribute toward the support of our daughter."

"And now, in conclusion, I have this proposition to make to you. The day on which you give me notice—which you can do at any time through Mr. Blank, the agent referred to—that you have discovered my daughter Florence and settled upon her the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, I will send your own pining brat back to your longing arms.

"As I shall be obliged to live abroad hereafter, my own means will be barely sufficient to my own comfort. You are richer than any one person has a right to be. I have no mind that my child shall suffer and *you* enjoy affluence. Be wise and submissive. Exert yourself to the utmost for the benefit of Florence. Otherwise, you may suffer a life-long regret. You know that I do not stop at half-way measures. The fates of those two girls are in the same boat. Take warning from these lines from one who has yet the power to prosecute—*one* is still."

"Your Mother."

"Ah, *mon Dieu*!" murmured Madame, shivering as if with January cold, "he knows well how to wound and to turn the dagger into the wound! I should have been on my guard! I

never should have relaxed my vigilance while he lived. Oh, my poor child! He will inflict a million little tortures upon her—perhaps drive her mad with his small persecutions. Mr. Vernon, you should have warned me—have prevented this thing happening."

"Madame, I did not know Ethan Goldsborough. I even felt for him great compassion. I could not forget that we had been friends and neighbors. I did not even suspect that he would try to give us farther trouble. All we can now do is to try to circumvent his plans to get out of the country. Where was that letter mailed?"

"On the train, at midnight," answered Charlie. "This is Friday. There are no European steamers leave New York on Friday. Two or three will leave on Saturday. We have plenty of time for them. I will get a yesterday's Boston or New York paper and hunt out the advertisements of all the steamers, at all the ports. We will telegraph, instantly, to all."

What a torture is inaction under such circumstances! As soon as Charlie saw there was something positive to do he felt a certain relief from the misery which preyed on his young spirits.

He snatched his hat and hurried off to find a paper and to telegraph. Anxious inquiries beset him at every step; and the news flew swiftly about that the absconding banker had kidnapped his own daughter and was trying to get out of the country with her. Everything was done which could be done by the use of the telegraph to arrest Goldsborough's flight.

Then Madame D'Eglantine and Mr. Vernon took the noon train out of Lycurgus, desiring to reach New York as soon as possible—before the sailing of the Saturday's steamers. While they were standing on the platform awaiting the arrival of the train, already in sight, Charlie came running up, carrying his duster and a small valise.

"Do you go along?" asked Mr. Vernon, surprised.

"Yes. I shall never cease my efforts, for a day or an hour, sir, until this tangle is straightened. If Mr. Goldsborough gets off, I shall then make it my business to find Florence. If she is alive, I will trace her out."

"How about your law studies?" asked his tutor, when they had taken their seats in the car.

"I shall be taking lessons in legal matters that will be worth more to me than the books," answered Charlie with a sad smile.

"I expected you to take charge of my house and affairs," added the lawyer.

"I made Mr. Lyman" (the minister) "promise to attend to everything."

"Well, I am glad to have you with us," said the elder gentleman, with a sigh; somehow he felt more reliance on Ward's young energy and fire than on his own experience.

"And I," added Madame, with a grateful look. "Of course, I shall see that you go to no expense, Mr. Ward. You must call on me for what money is wanted—and ah, do not spare it! Do not spare bribes, rewards, any thing that will be of service. You inspire me with confidence, Mr. Ward; you seem so brimming with zeal and resolution."

"My life and strength are at your service," said Charlie, flushing at this compliment from one who had hitherto been studiously cold to him. "Plenty of money is a good thing, too, in a case of this kind. A golden key unlocks many secrets."

"Use mine at your discretion," responded the madame.

A warm feeling of hope crept about the young man's heart. The rainbow, for him, already glimmered athwart the clouds; he would find the naughty runaway Florence, give her back her ring—Violet would be returned to her mother, who, grateful to him as the means of restoring her, would no longer frown down his suit—the ring given back to its owner, Violet would not distrust him—and there, at the end of the rainbow, if he could only come to it, was a wedding-scene of blissful beauty.

Then he dreamed in the swift-flying train. But no things are further apart, in this work-a-day world, than dreams and actualities.

The party arrived in New York on Saturday morning, and had consultations with skilled detectives, who immediately—rendered vigilant by splendid promises—boarded every steamer about to sail, and entered, also, into communication with their brother-officers in neighboring cities. They tried persuasion, threats and bribes, on the quiet, little, shrewd-looking man whom they found at No. 40, — Buildings; but he was unyielding as the Sphinx. He smiled at the threats—which he knew were idle: the law could not compel him to betray the whereabouts of his client when the client was only doing what he had a legal right to do, claiming the custody of his own daughter.

The rainbow was fading in Charlie's sky when he awoke the next morning, in his dull sleeping-room in the hotel, and saw that it was a rainy, raw, disagreeable day; realizing, at the same time, that the city was "considerable of a hay-stack" in which he might search long and patiently for so small a needle as little Florence Goldsborough.

He had not retired to rest the previous night until he had sent to each of the Sunday papers the following "Personal:"

"F. G.—Charlie is in town and wishes for an interview with the owner of the opal ring. He has good news, of the greatest importance, to communicate. Will F. G. answer, through 'Personals,' when he can see her?"

With burning eagerness he devoured the personal column every day of the ensuing week. No response. Meantime madame had selected a handsome suite of rooms in a private up-town boarding-house and settled herself therein; while Mr. Vernon, seeing that nothing had been gained so far, and the search likely to prove a long one, had returned to Lycurgus to arrange his affairs so that he could spend the winter in New York as at first proposed.

On the second Sunday Ward had another advertisement:

"F. G.—Your mother died three weeks ago. Her relatives live at No. — Lexington avenue, where you can hear of her death, by inquiring. V. V. is supposed to be in Europe. So is your father. I have much to tell. Do respond. CHARLIE."

A fortnight more dragged slowly by. It had some consequences. Madame D'Eglantine had no sooner settled down in her elegant apartments than a wild, feverish unrest took possession of her.

"I can not remain here—in this country," she cried, in the first moment of greeting Mr. Vernon on his return—"my darling is in Europe—who knows but that we may discover her whereabouts by going abroad and traveling from place to place. My heart tells me that I shall find her in Germany. Oh, I feel drawn thitherward by a power I have no wish to resist. Come! We will sail to-morrow—in the Germania."

"But you have engaged these rooms for the season!"

"Never mind. Mr. Ward shall occupy them in my place. He shall stop here, and continue the search for that willful girl who is making us all so much trouble. I must go. I can not sleep—eat—breathe! I feel suffocated. The suspense is killing me. It comes when I am no longer able to bear it. Only travel—change of scene—the constant expectation of finding my darling, will enable me to endure."

He was powerless before her impetuous will. Indeed, as he had much business to transact for her in France, and there was little doubt but that Violet had been taken to some foreign country, his own judgment approved the measure. From what he knew of Ethan Goldsborough he inferred that he would seek retirement in some large city—Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin.

Charlie saw them on the Germania, and turning, as the ship got slowly out into the stream, he walked away, muttering:

"And now, I must begin in good earnest. Inch by inch I must go over the ground"—a laughable idea, when we reflect that that ground was the great city and its suburbs which stretched about him for miles in every direction, except that toward the rear.

Stern resolution was stamped on the young features which had already gained in manliness, since his experience had been so suddenly enlarged. His boyish diffidence was wearing away under the smoothing hand of metropolitan

life; the consciousness of *work to do* gave him a certain dignity, very becoming to him. He wore his curly locks like a second Hesperion.

Down-town he was hustled in the battling crowd; but when he left the Sixth avenue car which he had taken, and walked along up to Fifth Avenue, and on toward the house—where a luxurious suite of rooms awaited him, which would have inspired the envy of almost any of the refined fops about him—many a bright eye glanced boldly or shyly, as the case might be, at the handsome rusticus.

Perhaps some of these beauties felt flattered at his earnest observation; but it was only a habit into which Charlie had fallen, of looking into every young and pretty face in his search for Florence's.

As he sauntered along, lonely and pre-occupied—so sad that he almost felt sick of life—his eyes fell, by the merest chance, on the occupants of a small, open carriage which was whirling by quite close to the curb-stone, drawn by a pair of beautiful jet-black horses, whose gold-plated harness flashed in the sun.

There were only two people in the carriage, the gentleman doing his own driving. He was a man to compel a second look—perfectly dressed, driving his spirited team with easy skill, having an expression of refined dissipation on his pale, handsome features.

"I have seen that face at the windows of the club house on the next block," thought Charlie, and then his eye fell carelessly on the lady who was the gentleman's companion. He saw an exquisite little figure richly attired, a tiny hand cased in a lavender glove; but her face was quite concealed by a double veil pinned carefully about her hat as if in care of her complexion. Yet, though the face was masked by the grenadine veil, something in the turn of the round, slender figure, the poise of the head, struck Charlie as very familiar. The carriage had not fairly passed, when he cried out, aloud, so as quite to startle some of the people about him:

"It is Florence!"

He turned. If it *was* Florence, she had seen him and given the alarm, for the gentleman had already spoken to his mettlesome horses and they were flying along at the highest rate of speed allowed. The carriage turned the first corner and dashed on. Charlie ran in pursuit, indifferent to the curious observers who paused to find out what the matter was.

"Stop that carriage, will you?" he shouted to a dignified M. P. on the south side of the block.

"Too late," said the officer, shaking his head—"out o' sight, now! Besides, I ain't no business stopping the carriage of a gent like Mr. Harold."

"Harold!" gasped Charlie—"then you know him?"

"Like a book," said the M. P., ostentatiously. "His club is on my beat. See him every day. B'longs to our fust families—regular high-flyer! Don't care for his money—"

"Any more than I do for mine," said Charlie, quickly, slipping a fifty dollar greenback into the man's hand. "I don't care for Mr. Harold, but if you will find out where the lady lives, whom he had in the carriage this afternoon, I will present you with the twin of that bill."

"I'll spend all my spare time, when I'm off duty, till I do find out," responded the policeman, grinning. "Didn't think that quiet chap, with a kind of Boston air about him, was up to such tricks that are vain," he commented to himself, as Charlie went on and he pocketed the greenback.

"If that was Florence—and I believe it was!" murmured Charlie, "I am afraid she has fallen into a terrible snare. What is she doing, out driving with that insolent fellow? By heaven! I would like to wring his neck for him! Ah, Florence! poor, motherless, willful, vain Florence! I tremble for you! I pray that I may find you speedily, if it be not already too late to find you the same innocent little girl with whom I have played, when you wore short dresses and a white sun-bonnet—not so very long ago!" mused the honest young fellow, with a sad smile.

"I've half a mind to linger around the club—"

house and shake the truth out of the puppy when he comes back there!"

CHAPTER XL

WHAT WILL HE DO ABOUT IT

To return upon our history to Fraser Harold and little dark-eyed Florence whiling away the moonlit June evenings together—dangerous amusement for one of the two! Scarcely a day passed, for four brief, bewitching weeks, but that Fraser contrived, in some way, to talk with, write to, or walk with his new acquaintance. Florence usually asked Mrs. Plimpton to walk with her for an hour in the park, after dusk, and usually her guardian-dragon declined, with the advice that she should go, however, for the air, as she must require it and the exercise to keep up her health. To this the little prisoner would give a meek assent, and stealing over to the shadows of the great trees in the inclosed grounds, would soon be joined by an impatient lover, who had spent a good part of his day in waiting for this hour—or, at least, so he always assured the young creature who welcomed him with such a blush and smile as not even the dusk and shadows could quite conceal.

Fraser's father was not quite so well as he had been; the family lingered in town on his account; and so the very Fates seemed leagued against our run-away by detaining the young Sybarite in her vicinity. Florence had betrayed how romantic and impracticable were her views of life, in coming to New York as she did. It cannot be expected that she should have acted with prudence subsequently. She lived in a dream-world—during those days—as different from the actual one as are the visions of the seventh heaven entertained by the luxurious Moslem, from the true heaven.

Her wildest hopes, her most splendid pictures of life, were to be swiftly realized. The most elegant, noble, fascinating man that ever trod the streets of New York was to marry her. He was fabulously rich; and she was to be decked in silks and jewels and to step into the magic circle of fashion and power.

Her heart was set to run to that tune—"power, wealth, triumph, love—love, triumph, wealth, power!"—and it beat to it most sweetly.

For she was a selfish little thing. Madly in love with Fraser Harold, she was sharp to calculate the advantages of marriage with such a man, and resolved that her beauty should be the magic key to open to her the doors of pleasure and pride.

She would wear diamonds and dresses from Paris; she would have everything on earth her fancy craved; she would have all Fraser's club friends, of whom he talked to her sometimes, admit her beauty—ah! what a flowery path was marked out for her elastic little foot!

And yet—if she had prudently stopped and recalled that fact!—Fraser had never yet said a word to her about marriage. He had made love to her—recklessly enough—but he had committed himself to no promises. In the simple village where she was reared, young men did not make love to young women unless they wished to marry them. She took everything for granted. She only wished that her admirer would be more impulsive and urge her to wed him before Mr. Rhodes' return; as then she would be driven from her present home and have no shelter proper to one of her expectations.

Two or three times she asked Mr. Harold, in her pretty, confiding way, what he thought she ought to do when Mr. Rhodes came back, and he had laughed, with some light assurance that she would be provided for.

So our foolish little beauty lived on air. The great mirrors which rose from floor to ceiling in the grand rooms, where she was free to roam about, as proudly as if they were her own—flattered her unceasingly as she flitted from one to another. They told her that Fraser Harold only spoke the truth when he painted her, in his gay and gallant phrases:

"As one made up
Of loveliness alone."

Although so small, Florence was exquisitely graceful; the excitement under which she now

continually lived, added new glory to the large, deep-fringed eyes lighting up the small, dark face, new bloom to the peachy cheeks, new witcheries to voice and smile. She was, too, one of those actual devotees at the shrine of the Goddess of Fashion, who catches every murmur of the oracle; and there was not a trick of movement, drapery or manner of the haughty and high-bred woman who flitted by her windows but our rustic belle caught it and made it her own.

A busy month that was to Florence, as well as the most important one of her short life. She had no time for *ennui*. In the morning, after breakfast, she haunted the windows, hovering behind the half-turned slats of the blinds like some houri behind the lattice-work of her courts, until Fraser Harold had passed by on his way down-town.

The one stolen glance which he directed toward the windows was enough for her to live upon until evening; though often, by some pre-arrangement, he contrived that she should get a little note or a flower in addition. We have said that our heroine had plenty of energy; she was at work, hard, many of those long, hot hours, after she became acquainted with Fraser, cutting, fitting and making for herself half a dozen beautiful dresses. This was work she was not accustomed to; but Mrs. Plimpton refused to bring a dressmaker to the house while her master was away, and Florence would have these rich garments prepared in anticipation of the day when her lover would ask her to go to church with him; and then, from church to his family. She spent all but a hundred dollars on finery—on a wedding *trousseau* before she had been asked to become a bride. At first, Mrs. Plimpton remonstrated with her on her extravagance; but mademoiselle assured her, loftily, that she was going where finer things than those would be required; and as the housekeeper knew little about her mysterious guest and the girl appeared to have plenty of money, she felt that she had no business to interfere, and patiently fulfilled all orders.

When Florence had finished an elegant robe she would put it on, and sweep about the dim drawing-rooms like a fairy princess, smiling at her own beauty and longing for the time to come when she could wear her pretty things openly for Fraser's admiration, instead of being compelled to steal to him in the shadow and in her plainest garb.

All of a sudden, on the fifth of July, just a month after his departure, Mr. Rhodes returned to his house on Gramercy Park.

Without even a telegram to the housekeeper, he arrived one evening about nine o'clock. He asked for a cup of tea, and when she brought it up to him in the library, and he had hurried over a few questions about her health, the state of the house, and so forth, he added:

"And how about your young visitor, Mrs. Plimpton?—have you had any trouble with her?"

"None at all, sir. She's a bit vain and extravagant, I'm thinking, sir; but an innocent thing, quiet as a lamb."

"Been contented, shut up here alone as it were?"

"She ain't worried or complained a mite, sir. Never spoken to a soul but me, sir, all these weeks; yet she seems cheerful."

"You think, then, she is all right—that her story was not made up for the occasion, Mrs. Plimpton?"

"Oh, she's no bad one, Mr. Rhodes. I'm certain o' that. But what under the sun an' moon she's going to do, beats me. She ain't nowise confidential, sir; and she's made herself beautiful clothes, and says she'll have need of 'em."

"Perhaps she is going back to her father. I have often regretted that I did not answer his advertisement. She pleaded with me not to; yet she is too young to judge for herself. I am afraid I ought not to have listened to her."

"And are you home for the rest of the summer, sir?" inquired the housekeeper, with some curiosity; she had been very impatient to learn what had brought her master back so unexpectedly.

"Oh, no; only for a day or two. I grew

tired of Newport, and am on my way to Saratoga. Of course I would not pass through the city without stopping a day to see how you are getting on. Miss Golden need not be frightened away from here just yet. I shall proceed on my way Thursday. The thought of her has worried me a good deal. I think I will urge her to-morrow to tell me her true reasons for fleeing from home, and perhaps advise her what course to pursue. I am glad to hear that you have no great fault to find with her, Mrs. Plimpton. It would have been a mortification to me to have had it turn out that she was the companion of some heart-smasher of a burglar."

"She's no character like that, Mr. Rhodes. I never thought *that* of her. But I wouldn't have much to say to her, for all that, if I was you, sir," added the shrewd housekeeper, anxious to keep her master out of the fatal range of the womanly artillery of eyes and lips, which the "natural-born flirt"—as she secretly dubbed Florence—would direct at him.

Mr. Rhodes sighed, leaned his head on his hand as if weary, and forgot to drink his second cup of tea.

"Where is she now?" he asked, suddenly looking up.

"Bless me, sir, how you startled me! She's taking a bit of air and exercise inside the park railings, sir."

"At this time of night?"

"Why, sir, it's not late, for a summer evening. The poor child doesn't put her foot out o' doors until after dark. She generally asks me to go with her; but I don't like the night-damp; and it's quite safe in the park, as you know."

"I will just step over and escort her across the street," remarked Mr. Rhodes, rising, entirely forgetful that he might be observed in this act of kindness by some of his neighbors.

However, the most of the houses in the vicinity were closed for the season; he supposed the dwelling of his friends, the Harolds, to have been deserted some time ago; and as he did recall the fact, in going down the steps, that he should not care to be seen escorting a young lady—for whom he could not account—into his mansion, it consoled him to remember that his acquaintances were probably far away.

He went lightly down the steps, across the street, and into the park. The moon was at the full, and shining so brightly in a clear sky that the lamps had not been lighted. The park was deserted, except for a solitary couple pacing slowly up and down a tree-shadowed walk some distance away. Mr. Rhodes peered sharply about at the seats under the trees, expecting soon to discover a little figure nestled on some one of them. He could not have answered had he asked himself why he felt such a strange, gentle pleasure in this guest—why such a warm thrill of benevolent impulse, of desire to cherish and protect this wild, foolish, imprudent, but innocent little creature, ran through his usually cool veins, as he walked about in the light and shadow looking for Miss Golden.

Her bright face, framed in its purple hair, and illumined with those glorious eyes, had haunted him so much since he went away, that actually, he would have felt love-sick and disappointed, had he been told, on reaching his threshold, that the pretty stranger had taken flight. Yet he was almost totally unaware of his feelings. He knew now that he took a certain pleasure in coming out to find the lost bird, who, frightened and panting, had beaten its wings against a new cage, seeking shelter, and been admitted.

He made the entire circuit of the park. No one—not a creature—but the couple pacing up and down that leafy avenue. Had Miss Golden seen him, and, alarmed, taken flight again? His spirits sunk; his feet lagged. He leaned against the trunk of a tree; for want of something else to do just then he watched the pair walking away down the arcade—a pair of lovers, evidently, for the lady clung tenderly to the gentleman's arm, with face lifted to catch the low words he spoke as he bent his head to murmur in her ear. It was not until they had turned, and walking back, approached within a few feet of him, that a sudden suspicion darted in-

to Redmond Rhodes' mind. They were in deep shadow; but surely he knew that tall, elegant figure, with the haughty, graceful head bent half-condescendingly!—surely that slender little form—Mr. Rhodes stepped quickly out into the center of the path, just as the two emerged from black shadow and advanced under the full splendor of the moon, until, seeing and recognizing him, they started and stopped.

It was not often that Fraser Harold was guilty of the weakness of blushing; but now, as he met the blazing eyes of his neighbor sternly reading his face, a deep purple flush passed over it. Rhodes looked at him until his eyes sunk, and then his contemptuous gaze turned on the girl, who, pale and shrinking, yet clung to her companion's arm, and whose eyes, although frightened and expanding, did not lower, but met his own honestly.

"So! this is the way you abuse my confidence, is it?" he spoke, after a full minute's silence, addressing the girl.

"Is it very wrong, Mr. Rhodes?—I did not mean it to be," she replied, humbly, casting at him a piteous look, brimming with tears. "I should have told you all the moment I saw you, if you had given me the opportunity."

"I found your little friend in the park, so lonely and sad, that I took it upon me, for your sake, Rhodes, to help her pass the time. No harm done, I hope," added Mr. Harold, with an attempt to laugh down the dark frown on his friend's face.

"I am afraid there is harm done, Fraser; this young girl is under my protection."

"Oh!" sneered Harold, "if you had told me that I should not have interfered."

"What do you mean, Mr. Harold?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Rhodes?"

"I mean that if this young lady is innocent, as she appears to me, I consider it my duty to protect her, as if she were my sister. Understand! I will do it, by Heaven! If you have deceived her, you shall answer to me for it, as one gentleman answers to another. Now you have my meaning."

Fraser was brave, to recklessness, but his debased moral nature quailed before the "righteous indignation" that flamed in the face of the man who confronted him. Yet he had no idea of giving up his prey. So infatuated had he become with the mingled art and artlessness, the daring and simplicity, the cunning and childishness combined, of the beautiful girl, that it would now have been the blackest disappointment of his life to have her snatched from under his influence by another.

The two men glared at each other like tigers. Fraser's blush had given place to a marble pallor; his lips were curled so as to show the line of his white teeth—he no longer shrunk from Rhodes' regard, but answered it with a wicked look of bold triumph.

Redmond Rhodes, older, colder, wiser, was quite as fiercely excited. In that first sharp pang which darted through his breast when he recognized the pair in that lovely attitude, was revealed to him the truth. He, too, was in love with the little adventuress!

His rage was prompted by his jealousy; his indignation by his knowledge of his rival's character. A sweet memory of the sweet face from which he had wiped the false wrinkles had haunted him in his journeyings and brought him home, to find those bright eyes shining, those curved lashes drooping under the love look of another. And that other, his friend—but a friend who could not be trusted in his affairs with women.

If Redmond had made up his mind to become the wooer of the unprotected beauty, he would have approached her with all the more delicacy and reverence on account of her position; but he knew that this was not the style of Fraser Harold.

He was terribly jealous. Having been calm and restrained all these years, it was as if a long-extinct volcano had suddenly flamed forth in fire and molten torrents. He had gone away, and in his absence, Fraser, the insolent, the graceful, the selfish, the all-conquering, had stolen into the company of the simple little girl, and wiled her very heart out at her melting

eyes. "I do not know what has passed between you and this gentleman; but I do know that he is a dangerous friend for you; and I warn you never to speak to him again. I want you to promise me that you will break off the acquaintance here and forever."

"Oh, Mr. Rhodes, I cannot do that. I love him, and he loves me—he has told me so a thousand times!—and I believe him!" and she darted a trusting smile and glance at her avowed lover.

"Has he asked you to marry him? Has he introduced you to his parents and sisters?"

"You have asked me to marry you, have you not, Fraser?" she asked, turning and laying her tiny hand on his. "Or, if you have not—in so many words—" she stammered, as she suddenly recalled the fact that never in all his passionate love-talk had he once mentioned the subject of marriage—"it is understood, is it not? Of course I expect to marry him, and soon," she said, with the air of a princess. "I am making my wedding-clothes, now—for I know Fraser would not—wish me to be dependent—oh, Fraser, why do you not speak, and tell Mr. Rhodes how you love me, and intend me to be your dear little wife, right away?" she suddenly broke forth, looking up with an expression of mingled reproach and confidence that would have melted a very selfish heart into an honest resolution.

The man of pleasure hesitated. He had grown wonderfully fond of this silly little country girl—but it was opposed to every habit and idea of his, the thought of tying himself to a wife, even were she the daughter of all the ancient Knickerbockers. So he stammered, as he looked down into her loving eyes:

"You know, Florrie, my sweet, that I would never harm you. I would be just as careful of you and your good name as this man, who is trying to make trouble between us."

"Oh!" moaned Florence, wringing her hands, "I wish it were not so late—or that I knew one soul in this great city beside—I would go away this minute from you two men, and neither of you should ever see me again. Fraser, you swore to me that you loved me."

"I do, my girl—I love you to distraction."

"Very well," interrupted Rhodes, struggling to speak calmly—"and you love him?"

"As my life!"

"Then, allow me to make a suggestion to you, sir. It is not too late to find our mutual friend, the Rev. Mr. Brown, in his parlors. He will unite you to this lady without delay. I will accompany you to the rectory and give the bride away. Situated as she is, if you have a spark of manliness, Fraser Harold, you will marry her to-night."

The white fingers of the moonlight painted the three faces even more pallid than they had become through emotion. That of the last speaker glowed with the dignity of his feelings; in that moment of manly defense of helpless beauty he looked so grand, so more than any merely young and handsome man can look, that Florence, panting, distressed as she was, even in the very instant of suspense, stole at him a look of admiration and gratitude.

Fraser, as if ashamed to have the pure moon read his face, shrunk a little into the shadow, and when the girl to whom he had been making passionate love for a month, turned again, timidly stretching out her little hands

toward him with a touching gesture of faith, he half averted it from the eager glance of the great, soft eyes. The two others waited so long for his answer it seemed to them he had determined not to give it.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW DANGER.

AMONG the frequenters of the gambling table at a certain German Spa, in the season of 1870, none attracted such universal attention as a certain American gentleman known there as Mr. Goldenough. It was not that he played with a dare-devil recklessness—nor even that he had a marvellous run of luck which continued week after week and made him the envy of the old play-eaters who lived on the feverish drug of a morbid excitement—but that he was generally accompanied by his daughter—a young creature, scarcely seventeen, whose rare and delicate beauty, of a type to set raving the coldest critics of woman's loveliness, was enhanced by her evident utter indifference to it, and the sweetly-sad expression of a pair of blue eyes whose purity was like that of the deep Alpine lakes which mirror nothing but the heaven above them.

Tall and slender; with hair, like the ripple of sun-burnished waves, coming low and thick over a smooth white forehead, there was a freshness perfectly exquisite in the pure pink and white of her complexion—a charm, of itself, seldom seen except in her own land; while the short upper lip and the full under one, gave just enough promise of tenderness and warmth to soften the cold beauty of her other features. She was always dressed with plain elegance—no more coquetry in her attire than in her manner; always accompanied the pompous, handsome father who spent hours of every afternoon and evening at the magic tables; always waited with the same air of pensive indifference. Counts and dukes, barons and gay young bloods might stare at her by the hour; the only sign of consciousness of their observation she ever gave was to draw down her veil if any one's stare became insolent. So afraid of this loss to their feasting eyes did the lovers of beauty become, that they were extremely careful not to appear to be studying that fair countenance; and if some conceited fop, by too rude or prolonged a gaze, was the cause of the veil's coming down, he was frowned at as a common nuisance by the others. Young German artists, with wild, long hair and unkempt beards, would conceal their sketch-books behind the players, and steal the likeness of that loveliest face to reproduce it a thousand times afterward in their pictures. It came to be a question addressed to all new-comers—"Have you seen *la belle Americaine*?"

Men, high in the world of power and fashion, sought the acquaintance of the American banker and made themselves agreeable to him. He was genial and reciprocative; but he seldom introduced his daughter.

To Violet, this life she was leading with this new-found father of hers was strange, as any page out of a book of fiction. She never could fully realize that it was herself who went through the quiet part, day after day, marked out for her by her manager; still less could she realize that this manager was her father, or that either was the sober deacon of the little Lycurgus church, the great man of the small New England village, toward whom, all her young life, she had felt a certain awe tempered by vague distrust.

On that afternoon when she had been accosted by Mr. Goldsborough on the road, near the bridge, and he begged her, importunately, to ride with him a little way while he could give her some messages for her mother, which he did not care to deliver personally, it was not until several miles had been passed over and her companion began to urge his horse to his utmost speed, that she realized his plan of abduction. She entreated him not to visit upon her his anger at others; but he reproached her as bitterly as unjustly of being the cause of his dear Floy's being driven to the rash step she had taken, and swore a terrible oath that her friends should never hear of her

until his own darling was found. He explained to her his rights, as her father; made her believe that no complaints of hers would be listened to by strangers or officials, when told that he was her legal guardian; painted to her timid mind the uselessness and unpleasantness of public "scenes," and had her so intimidated by the time they reached a distant town at nine that evening, that she never made a word of complaint to the people about her, but drank the cup of tea he procured for her at the railroad station, and entered the car, a little later, as he ordered her to do. It is probable that he got some person, by paying him, to mail his letter—which he had prepared beforehand—to Madame D'Eglantine, on a train going in the opposite direction and at some point south of Lycurgus. Certain it is, he and his unwilling companion went aboard a northern-bound train, and in due time reached Portland, where, after making a few necessary purchases for his daughter, he hurried her on board a vessel about to sail for Nova Scotia, and only delaying to weigh anchor until their arrival on board. Poor Violet's heart shrunk with dread from this man, who seemed capable of anything, now that the sheepskin, in which he had so long masqueraded, had fallen from his shoulders.

She resolved, when they reached the port where they were to disembark and take the first New York steamer calling on its way to Liverpool, to run away and throw herself on the protection of strangers. But she had no money and no courage to place herself in so forlorn a condition, and, as Mr. Goldsborough had assured her he should return her to her mother as soon as certain negotiations pending between them were ended, she concluded to submit silently to his plans.

He compelled her to assume the dress of an English servant-girl, and himself was clothed like a rough farmer—they took second-cabin tickets, and her father told her, on the second day out, that there was not a person on the steamer who knew him.

Arrived in London rooms were taken in a retired inn in an old-fashioned part of the city; and here she was told to resume suitable attire, and was taken to a ladies' furnishing shop where liberal orders were given for a complete outfit suitable for a young lady about to travel on the continent.

They had then crossed the channel and gone immediately to this German Spa, where letters were already awaiting Mr. Goldenough, as he now gave his name. Here he took very handsome rooms in a private hotel, and told Violet, curtly, that she had nothing to do but see the world and enjoy herself. They had not been settled in their new quarters twenty-four hours before Mr. Goldenough began to haunt the roulette tables. He had nothing else to do. All the associations of his life were broken up—he was devoured with corroding anxieties and passions; and he could not await in idleness the result of the daring move he had last made. The game of chance offered itself as a temporary relief to his craving restlessness; he began to play, had unusual good fortune, and became infatuated. It was just the medicine to a mind diseased as was his. For two or three hours each afternoon, and from eight to eleven each evening he was at his post, choosing his numbers and waiting the turn of the devilish little instrument with utter apparent coolness, no matter how large the risks. By one of those curious freaks of chance, such as sometimes gives the thirteen trumps to a whist-player, he was almost invariably a winner—until the proprietor of the establishment began to entertain secret thoughts of having him quietly assassinated, to prevent the breaking of the house.

Of course he felt, and knew, that his extraordinary luck must turn sometime to disaster. Within his own mind he resolved that at the first signs of a change, he would quit, not only the tables, but the town. A resolve about as wise as when one ventures into a quicksand with the resolution that when he is drawn in up to the knees he will begin to retreat.

Monsieur Goldenough never left his hotel to visit the gambling halls, or drive, or promenade,

without compelling his daughter to attend him. He was constantly fearful that she might make the attempt to leave him. Even at night he kept the key of her sleeping-room, which opened on the corridors. Yet he might have allowed her more liberty—might have spared her, at least, the, to her, terribly disagreeable task of haunting the hells of Baden. For he never allowed her any money, although dressing her beautifully and giving her fine apartments—and Violet was too shrinking to attempt to dispose of her jewelry, or to venture a flight through a foreign country and over the Atlantic, had she thus procured the means of paying her way.

No wonder the melancholy which settled down upon her young spirits cast a cloud over her fair, pure, delicate face. The cause of that melancholy was the subject of much earnest discussion among the young snobs who made it a pious duty to devote a part of each day to worship at her shrine. *La belle Americaine* was rich and an only child, apparently—very devoted to her father, for was she not constantly with him? Such an instance of affection between parent and child was as rare as it was admirable!

Had she really lost her mother? No, for she was not in mourning. Was it then, an *affaire de cœur*? Had the adorable young divinity fallen indiscreetly in love with some youth, whose purse, or whose genealogical record was not long enough, and had her father brought her across the water to allow the tender impression to become obliterated by newer ones? So they chatted about our modest Violet—stared at her—fell in love with her, each after his way.

It was a situation which *Florence* would have keenly enjoyed; but to Violet it was torture as keen. More than once, in those public places, the tears rushed into her eyes, and hung glittering on the long, down-bent lashes until they dried of themselves, for she dared not lift a hand to wipe them away.

If, by chance, M. Goldenough, pointing with his little stick to the numbers he considered lucky, and awaiting the turn of the wheel, raised his eyes to his daughter's patient face and saw it pale, or the mist gathering in her large blue eyes, a fiendish joy swelled in his heart. For he hated her! Hated her, because she had lived, in spite of him, and been the unconscious means of thwarting his plans for the only human being he had ever really loved—his other, favorite daughter.

The only real pleasure he had, away from the gaming-table, was in thoughts of the agony he had inflicted on the woman whom in youth he had so cruelly wronged; and in watching the "sadness and longing" creep over the face of the young creature whom he had chained to him.

To some natures, to wrong another is also to excite hatred of the one injured. It was so with this man. The trusting girl whom he had made his wife, only to heartlessly disown and desert when he found her claims to enormous wealth denied, had fought her way to triumph and success—for her child's sake—over a path of fire which would have blasted and killed any but a most heroic woman; and now he burned to be revenged on her that she had dared to live and struggle. He had formed a dastardly plan to strike so that the wound would hurt the most surely. She had said that at last she was independent of him, and in return he had robbed her of her child.

Beyond this brutal revenge he had also the purpose to benefit his own daughter. He could not endure to think that Violet would be heirless to estates that would rank with those of the richest nobles of France, and his *Florence* live on the fag-ends of the small fortune not any too great for his own uses. He considered it a good joke to compel Madame D'Eglantine to contribute to the aggrandizement of his pet. If he could wring from her a noble sum for *Florence* to enjoy, there would be a spice of delight about the spending of that money which only an epicure in wickedness could fully relish.

He had letters from his agent, Blank, from time to time, giving reports of the progress of affairs in New York. On the day after the sailing of the *Germania* he received a cable dis-

patch, in cipher, informing him of the two passengers who had so quickly made up their minds to depart on that steamer.

Well! the season at the Spa was about closing. He had thirty thousand dollars in gold more than when he set his foot on foreign soil; and had lived well all the time. He was quite ready for a move. He made his preparations for a trip up the Nile.

"Give me a week the start, and madame will have a fine time pursuing us!" he laughed to himself. "And if she overtakes us—what then? I shall demand my daughter before I give up hers! The game is in my own hands. I will have some amusement at madame's expense, and receive twenty thousand pounds from her as a gift to my pet!"

"I need not leave Baden-Baden for six days yet," he continued to muse. "In that time I must make the magic wheel turn a few times more for my benefit. And, by George, it will be a joke worth playing to marry this lily-faced daughter of mine to that old scamp of an English Jew baronet who asked me yesterday if he might pay his addresses to her! I'll invite him to join us on our excursion to Egypt; 'twill make it so pleasant for Miss Violet—ha! ha! ha!"

It would seem as if, the lid of hypocrisy which had so long covered the seething caldron of Goldsborough's mind having been removed, all the hell-broth of the witches of the heath was steaming up out of it.

It is not strange that Violet, inexperienced in reading human nature, but quick-witted and observant, shrunk more and more into herself, and continually suffered from a shuddering dread and distrust of this companion—this unloved father, the very echo of whose voice shook her soul with intangible terrors to which she could give no shape.

Those terrors were fated to take shape quickly enough.

On the evening after reading the cable dispatch Mr. Goldsborough did not have his usual luck—he ventured more and more, losing every time, much to the amusement and excitement of the spectators who had so long been interested in his wonderful good fortune. The news that the American was losing drew a crowd to watch his movements.

At length, when M. Goldenough had lost a twentieth part of his previous winnings, Sir Israel Benjamin laid his hand on his arm, in trepidation at seeing so much of the gold, which he already counted as his own, disappear out of his future.

"Come away, my friend," he whispered, eagerly.

"It is early," responded the player, indifferently.

"You have forgotten your engagement with me," persisted the baronet, aloud.

"Oh! if I have an engagement, that is a different thing!" said Mr. Goldenough, reluctantly rising; and he, his daughter, and the English baron walked away, followed by dozens of pairs of eyes and plenteous comments, among the latter the most frequent being:

"He will marry *la belle Americaine* to that old roue!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A VERY BRIGHT BUBBLE.

"I WOULD like to know your intentions," repeated Redmond Rhodes, in a voice which sounded greatly like a threat. "If you love and intend to marry this young lady, I am your friend, and will go with you at once, as I said, to the rectory."

"I cannot obtain a license at this late hour, Mr. Rhodes," was the answer, in a hoarse voice.

"It will not be necessary. A marriage, before witnesses, in this State, is a legal marriage. I will see you safely through the affair."

Thinking that Harold was about to yield to his demand, Redmond's stern tones grew gentler; there thrilled through them a vibration of sadness caught by the quick ears of the girl. Even in that supreme moment of love, fear, suspense, agitation, she shot a velvety glance at the man who was so nobly caring for her best

welfare, and thought, with triumph, that he, too, had been chained to her chariot wheels. Yes, even at that moment, deep as was her infatuation with Fraser Harold—perfect, beyond all imagined perfection, as he was in her eyes—there darted through the busy brain of the beautiful coquette the idea that, if she lost him whom she preferred to all others, she would not be without the chance of a husband, and a splendid one!

Perhaps it was this consciousness which prevented her fainting from the excess of her emotions; for, to a vain woman, the flitting of a man's love, even though she be entirely indifferent to him, is incense so exhilarating as to enable her to endure much.

Finally Harold reached out and took one of the little hands extended to him, saying in that soft, low, passion-fraught voice which he knew so well how to use:

"My love, surely I do not need to assure you of my intentions! If you do not trust me fully, unreservedly, then your love for me is not what I thought it was. My friend Rhodes means well. But he is hurrying us in rather a peremptory manner. Do you think, my darling, that I ought to be hastened—without any preparation, or even consulting my parents—into a marriage? I leave it to you. You shall decide for both of us."

A deep flush passed over the dark, spirited face of the girl. It was cruel of Fraser—circumstanced as she was—to force the decision as to how he should act in a dilemma of this kind, upon her!

She knew that he wanted her to refuse for him Mr. Rhodes' settlement of their difficulties—and yet, what, what could she do? Go back under the roof of this strange gentleman, who had not even a sister to give her countenance?—while Fraser had sisters and a mother to whom he could take her if he would! A look of desperation passed over her beautiful face.

"Kill me, Fraser," she murmured, drooping piteously before him. "If you do not want me, nobody wants me!—I am out of place in the world."

"Scoundrel!" muttered Rhodes, in his neighbor's ear. "You will have to answer to me for your conduct. I am this young lady's brother from this hour forward. So, look out! You wed her to-night, or you part from her forever. I will see that she is placed with friends. Now, look at her, and take your choice."

As he spoke the bells of the city pealed ten o'clock.

"Oh, Fraser, do not forsake me!" pleaded Florence.

"I cannot give you up, the devil knows," was his half-angry response. "You have twisted your threads about me until you have me a prisoner. Well, what will you have? You are infernally pretty and taking; but not just the lady I would have chosen for the wife of a Harold. Never mind that, now. The mischief is done. My friend here is a man of honor, and he tells me I ought to marry you. It may be so. I yield to his superior wisdom—and my wife's charms! In return—my Lady Harold, and you, Mr. Rhodes!—will it be too much if I exact a promise that our marriage shall be kept a secret between us three and the clergyman for a few weeks?—only a few weeks. You will consider, friend Rhodes, that my father is in a critical condition and that any sudden shock—especially if an unpleasant one—may finish him. On that account, and some others important only to myself, I would exact a promise that this wild and hurried marriage be kept secret for the present. Do you agree?"

"I agree to anything, dear Fraser," murmured Florence.

Redmond Rhodes did not yield his answer so readily; but, after some reflection, he replied:

"I will promise to keep the secret until, in my judgment, your father is in fit condition to be informed of it—no longer. Should he die, I shall be at liberty to promulgate it as soon after his death as I think proper. And I trust you will not be ashamed of this little girl, friend Fraser; and that you will treat her as she deserves, to be treated, and as a good husband

ought to treat his honored and beloved wife."

"You are a preacher born, Redmond Rhodes! I only wonder you never took to the robes," cried Harold, gayly, and he offered his arm to the trembling girl with all his customary graceful *empressment*—the decision having been reached, his spirits rose—no more doubt or embarrassment now! If the little one was determined to marry him, and his best friend determined that she should, why! they must take the consequences! He did not intend to be responsible for anybody's sufferings or pleasure but his own. It would be heavenly, for a time, to live with and love this glorious, fairy creature, whose eyes were made of dark and dew, with molten diamonds flashing through; whose lips were sweeter than the sweets of flower-buds in June's languorous heats.

"What shall we do! Where shall we go! Lead on, Macduff!"

"Perhaps, since you enjoin secrecy"—Redmond's grave tones were in strong contrast to the gayety of his neighbor's—"it will be best for you to come over into my house. I can send a note to Dr. Brown; he will come at my request, and the ceremony can be performed—with closed doors—in my library."

"Good!" assented Fraser, "the arrangement could not be improved upon."

"Then, come at once, or the note will find the rector in his bed."

Mr. Rhodes led the way, and the three crossed over and entered his door, the maiden now clinging silently and timidly to her lover's arm. No one, except James, who had accompanied his master home, saw the little party enter the house; they slipped into the library, closing and locking the door.

"I will give you a letter to take to the rector for me, in a moment, James," said Mr. Rhodes. "If Mrs. Plimpton wants to know if I have any orders, tell her no—that she can retire at once."

Very soon the important note was written and dispatched; and, then the writer stole a covert look at the lovers. Both seemed a little pale and *distracted*, but Fraser was the most so.

"Mr. Rhodes," asked the bride-to-be, "how long will it be before the arrival of—of—the clergyman?"

"Twenty minutes, perhaps."

"Then, may I run up-stairs and change my dress? This is a black one, and I would not like to be married in black."

"Quite right. But do not keep us waiting."

In just twenty minutes Florence came down. The housekeeper was in her room—Florence heard her there—and James had not returned; so she reached the library without an eye observing her.

Both gentlemen started when the lovely, poetic vision floated into the room. In all the haste of her dressing Florence had had time to think over the situation—and to approve of it. Her superb eyes shone with unwonted light; her dark cheeks glowed like the sunny side of velvetiest peaches; a smile, or a light that was scarcely a smile, but much more luminous, irradiated the vivid face, making the delicate, perfect features fairly startling in their beauty.

A long-trailing robe of some airiest white texture floated about her *petite* figure; there were white roses in her purple-black hair and on her bosom, where glittered the only ornament she wore—a diamond locket which Fraser had given her.

She was going to be Fraser's wife—Fraser, so proud, so careless, the prince of men! Fraser, whom she adored as the child adores the moon for which it cries! She was going to be his wife—the sharer of his glory, his wealth; the future intimate of his haughty sisters.

All was well with her. How soon the pictures of her imagination had become splendid realities! Ah! what a fairy-world this was! How full of delight!—nothing to do but enjoy one's self beyond her wildest dreams! And oh—oh! how she loved her prince! How happy, how happy they would be, all their days, in each other's society.

And so, with a last fond look at her flattering mirror, she had floated like a white thistle-

down over the stairs and glided into the room where her lover awaited her, cheeks glowing, eyes shining, feet hardly touching the floor.

"By Jove! my beautiful! you are worth making some sacrifice for!" whispered Fraser, who had been biting his mustache in ill-concealed vexation and trepidation, and had not once spoken to his host during her absence; and he folded the charming vision to his heart, quite satisfied, under the stimulus of her lovely smile and blush, he had been hurried into a wedding against his will.

A mist came over Redmond Rhodes' eyes; he turned abruptly, affecting to look for a prayer-book on the shelves; the hall-door opened and closed, and Mr. Rhodes hurried out to meet the clergyman and assure him that all was right between the parties, and that it was because of the father's critical condition that the son wished his marriage to remain a secret between the four, at present.

The assurance of Redmond Rhodes was sufficient to do away with all scruples on the part of the Rev. Dr. Brown, who had not a parishioner in whose word he placed more implicit credence—or on whose judgment he would be so willing to rely. And if the rector had wondered to hear that the incorrigible, the conscienceless Mr. Fraser Harold, was caught at last, and in the way of being toned down into a quiet married man, he wondered no longer after he had seen the bride.

In all the ultra-fashionable weddings at which he had figured for so many years, not once had such a perfect embodiment of girlish beauty appeared before him as in the little lady who took her place by her lover's side—a creature so bright, so glad, so enchantingly pretty that the sober clergyman could not sufficiently admire her.

In a magically brief time little Florence Goldsborough found herself Mrs. Fraser Harold!

"Ah, if the stupid people of Lycurgus could know it!" she thought, in her triumph; but this last drop in the sweet wine of her success was not to be added just then; and she signed a record with a trembling little hand, and had her marriage certificate given to her by the clergyman, who charged her, smilingly, to take good care of it, accepted the gold which Fraser pressed upon him, wished them joy, and vanished from the scene.

"And now, friend Redmond, since you have done so much, you will not refuse to my wife the shelter of Mrs. Plimpton's wing for another night?" asked Harold, rising to go, as soon as the rector had departed. "As you allowed me short time for preparation you will not complain if she trespasses on your hospitality a few hours more. To-morrow, bright and early, I will set about seeking a home for you, little wife; at twelve o'clock a carriage will come for you; I will join you somewhere, within a block or two of this house, and we will at once go to housekeeping. Does the programme please?"

"Anything you wish, Fraser," murmured the bride; he kissed her, shook hands with Rhodes, and walked out of the house.

Then Mr. Rhodes said good-night in his most stately manner, and the little bride went slowly up the stairs to her room, where she sat until the moon went down, in her wedding-dress, at the window, looking over at the dark trees in the park, shedding a few tears, but in the main very hopeful and happy; very full of foolish anticipations; quite forgetful that those who build their houses on the sand must expect them to fall when the winds come and the rains beat.

The vision of that joyous, beautiful bride haunted Redmond Rhodes many wakeful hours of that night; he was conscious that he could have loved her—that he had come home for nothing in the world but to try his fate with her—and he sighed drearily and often not only for his own disappointment but for the ill choice she had made.

"Still, it may be that his marriage to a lovable young wife will reform Fraser," he mused; and so he prayed it might be.

When the carriage came, at noon of the following day, for Florence, Mrs. Plimpton be-

lieved that, as the little refugee said, expected friends at last had claimed her. A trunk containing the few dresses and *lingerie* which had been prepared was taken up beside the driver; Florence, with sudden tears in her bright eyes, wrung the housekeeper's hard hand, leaving in it a considerable portion of the money she had remaining, and then—all alone, poor thing! with not one to wish her joy, to fling after her even an old shoe, to give her seasonable advice, or to take heed what became of her—for Mr. Rhodes had departed in the morning, as abruptly as he came—she fled down the stately stone steps, where a few weeks previously she had sunk in her weariness, and hid herself in the carriage which whirled her away to the new, strange, longed-for, yet uncertain life which awaited the unacknowledged bride.

Scarcely had her tears begun to fall, before her husband was in the carriage, kissing them away, and they disappeared in smiles. Regrets, fears, haunting memories of home and mother, were swallowed up in the great flood of happiness which swept through her being.

Given plenty of money and a large metropolis, and marvels can be wrought which sober country people would deem impossible. Young Harold had worked one of these miracles. In the few morning hours which he had devoted to the business he had found a home where he could place his bride, while none of his world should dream that in this other world—this double life—he kept a sweet little wife imprisoned in a golden cage.

Resolved to remain a gay bachelor in the eyes of his friends, he had proceeded with as much caution as if engaged in some criminal enterprise. Far over on the west side, and a good way up-town—as remote from his father's house, his club, or any acquaintance of his as he could get it—in a handsome private house, occupied by a French lady to whom money was an object, he had engaged a very fine suite of rooms comprising the whole of the second, or parlor, floor. The lady was pledged to receive no other boarders; her own family consisted of her husband and two little children, a girl and boy, six and eight years of age.

To this woman our little bride was introduced by Fraser as "My wife, Mrs. Fraser." Florence blushed deeply, not only because this was her first introduction to any one by her husband, but also because he had chosen to deny her the full use of the title to which she had a right—yet she had no thought of rebelling; Fraser had assured her that it was only prudent to conceal a portion of their name—otherwise the story of his marriage might come unexpectedly upon his father at any hour, proving most disastrous.

"Among other ill consequences, my sweet, he will cut me off in his will. Neither of us are fitted for poverty, as you know. Only be patient a little while, and all these unpleasant hindrances to our full happiness shall be removed."

So Florence went willingly into this house as Mrs. Fraser; nor did she dream that the black-eyed Frenchwoman construed her wifely blush into a blush for something worse.

"I hope you like these apartments, darling," said Fraser, with his arm about her waist, "for you will spend so much time in them that you will have the chance of becoming tired of them."

"They are delightful, Fraser; and I could never weary of any place with you."

"But I shall not always be with you, my sweet. You understand why we must be very circumspect?"

"Yes," with a little sigh, followed by a confiding glance of the soft dark eyes, stolen at him so shyly from under the ambush of the drooping lashes that he could not regret what he was doing. "It is very good of you to get such magnificent rooms, to please me. I trust you are quite able to afford them?"

"You must not fret your pretty brow about money matters, my pet. I am glad you like the place. Madame Florian has promised to be very kind to you, in my absence. See! this is your wedding-bouquet. I chose it at the florist's an hour ago."

On a little table of rare woods, inlaid with rich designs in ebony and gold, standing between the front windows of the drawing-room, was a large pyramid of fragrant, snowy flowers—tube-roses, white violets, white carnations and roses, which filled the place with subtle perfumes.

"And here is a ring to guard the wedding-ring," continued the bridegroom, taking from his vest-pocket a splendid solitaire diamond ring and placing it on the tiny, dimpled finger, where a band of plain gold already glittered—a ring Florence had worn for some time and hastily adopted, the previous evening, to meet the emergency. The dimpled finger seemed almost too frail for the magnificent gem with which the husband encircled it.

"Your wardrobe is limited," continued the lavish lover. "You must amuse yourself, days when I cannot come to you, buying new dresses, bonnets and shawls," and he playfully urged into her hand a well-filled wallet.

Florence's eyes shone more brightly than her diamonds. She would have been wild with bliss anywhere with Fraser; but she dearly loved finery, too; luxury, idleness, were cravings of her temperament; to adorn her beauty, and have it admired, her fondest duty.

The center room of the suite of three was to be used as their private dining-room; and here, in a couple of hours, a small table was laid for two, adorned with a profusion of flowers, and waited upon by two silent attendants, while a dinner, fit for the bridal banquet, comprising the costliest delicacies within the power of a Delmonico to furnish, was served *a la Russe*.

And thus in a fairy world, where all was different from the life she had led as a girl in a dull country village—in a fairy world of luxury, of careless ease, of youthful passion and bliss, with no thought for the morrow, but only the expectation of a long reign of idle pleasure, the honeymoon rose splendidly for Florence.

Alas! before the term of that magic honeymoon was over she had shed many bitter tears—learned many bitter truths. Before it had waned into darkness she had longed, with aching heart, more than once, for the dull peace and safety of her village home.

CHAPTER XIV.

STRUGGLING TO BREAK THE TOILS.

THE pretense of an engagement was only a ruse of the baronet's to get M. Goldenough away from the gaming-table. The three walked out, and over into the pleasure-grounds, where crowds of idlers were sitting under the trees, at little tables where refreshments were served, or pacing up and down avenues lighted with colored lamps. The music of an excellent band, playing the delicious Strauss waltzes, floated airily over all, between the gay earth and the far, pure, steady stars. Violet looked up to those pure stars, shining unswervingly in the dark-blue ether, wishing, with a wild, wordless spasm of pain, that she was up there among their bright company, or somewhere out of this strange, foreign atmosphere of smoke and beer, of a mockery of gayety, of fictitious glare like that of the stained lights.

Homesickness, deep and deadly, was upon her. Fear, dread, terror of she knew not what, hung about her like the formless shadow of some huge approaching, but as yet unseen, ill. The baronet had offered her his arm, with a smile that made her turn cold with aversion; and to escape the necessity of taking it, she had quickly slipped her hand over her father's arm; but this was nearly as disagreeable to her. Sir Israel had only smiled the more uncomfortably; and so they had walked on, without speaking, until, reaching a table under the trees in a more quiet part of the park, the baronet asked them if they would rest here a little while, and have an ice.

M. Goldenough placed his daughter in a chair on one side of the small round table; Sir Israel sat opposite, with the father between them. An order was given for the ices.

"How very pale mademoiselle is to-night," remarked the nobleman. "I trust, M. Goldenough, that what I said to you yesterday has

nothing to do with the loss of her usual bloom."

"I am not well; I do not think the air of the place agrees with me," Violet forced herself to say.

Sir Israel leaned his folded arms on the table, and kept his small, black, beady eyes fixed upon her, with a smile, that was most like a leer, intended to express his unbounded admiration—perhaps something more tender than admiration. Violet shuddered inwardly, sitting there like a marble image, never raising her eye.

The baronet was a person of "uncertain age," as they say of spinsters; some thought him fifty, others vowed he was seventy, if a day. He was very rich, and very mean, and very ugly—ugly in features and temper. He lived on the continent a good part of the year, because he could live more cheaply than on his estates. He had a passion for watching others play, but never himself ran any risks. He had black eyes which revealed little of his thoughts, a Jewish nose, an ugly under-lip, a small, lean, bent figure, quick motions, dyed his hair and beard, was dreaded in financial operations as one equally unscrupulous and successful, and had as little about him of the better part of human nature as it was possible to have, and not be actually guilty of atrocious crimes. He was too cunning to do things forbidden by law; but anything which could be twisted to be within legal limits, which avarice or inborn wickedness prompted, he would do. Ever since they came he had had those sinister eyes on the pompous American and his beautiful daughter. He could have told, as accurately as the player, what his gains had been in that time. He made up his mind that M. Goldenough was much richer than he was. For once his shrewdness was at fault—the overpowering, patronizing manners of the banker had given generally the impression that he was a person of immense wealth and importance.

Also, after remaining eighteen years a widower, he had resolved to marry *la belle Americaine*, if such an achievement were possible. It was not love; nor even the passion of men for women; but another phase of his avarice that urged him to the resolve—the avarice which craved the best and most beautiful for his own. As one man will love the finest picture, not for love of art, but to have it said that *he owns it*—or another, the horse which has made his mile in half a second less than any other of his race ever made it—so the baronet, seeing how the city was going wild over the delicate bloom, the reserved charms, the fair perfection of the American banker's peerless child, coveted her for his own.

"I have not spoken to my daughter of your flattering proposition," remarked M. Goldenough, suavely. "I can reveal it to her now as well as any time. Violet, my dear, Sir Israel Benjamin does you the great honor to offer you his heart and hand."

Violet cast a startled look from one to the other of the two men.

"You do not understand me?" repeated M. Goldenough, with a cruel smile. "Sir Israel, our noble friend here, does you the very great and unexpected honor to offer you his hand in marriage."

"It is my daughter's first offer," he continued, a moment later, turning blandly to the baronet; "it surprises her, and she has not the self-possession to meet it as she would like to. You must pardon much to her youth and inexperience."

"Divine fault of modesty and innocence! How can I but admire and forgive a hesitation so angelic?" murmured Sir Israel, rolling up his eyes and clasping his hands, as if paying his devotions to a saint.

All this time the large blue eyes of the girl were dilating, and her sweet, pure face growing whiter; aversion, horror, and fear were painted on it, as shadows of distorted demons are thrown from a magic-lantern on the blank surface of the screen. To have saved her life she could not have uttered a word. But as she glanced from one face to the other of those two heartless men, and realized how completely she was in their power—as she saw the wicked exultation in the smile of the father

whom, she felt, hated her, and saw the pleasure he took in her misery—she turned cold, from head to foot, with a deep, sickening fear of she hardly knew what. Then, involuntarily, she cast an appealing look at the stolid waiter who was placing the ices on the table, and around upon the strange foreign people who would and could do nothing for her. Oh, for her own dear, kind father's—as she called Mr. Vernon—arms about her! Oh, to be safe under the old roof-tree! But, alas! everything here was alien, and she was like a poor little mouse under the spell of the cat that tortures it. M. Goldenough's stealthy paw reached out to give her another paralyzing pat.

"I will answer for her, Sir Israel, that she deeply feels the honor you have done her, gratefully accepts your offer; and consents to a rather unseemly hastening of the marriage solely on account of our proposed departure from Baden."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," said the old baronet, trying to take one of the little cold hands in his own, but which recoiled from his touch with a gesture which brought a malicious gleam into the small black eyes, "than to go with mademoiselle before the mayor, to-morrow. Can we not so arrange it?"

"Not to-morrow, Sir Israel. We will not hurry the poor child so much as that. These young ladies must be humored. This is Friday. On Tuesday I leave for Italy and Egypt. On Monday, then, let us say, the civil and religious ceremonies may both be performed. Did I understand you, Sir Israel, that you will, with your bride, accompany me on my projected tour?"

"That will be as mademoiselle decides. I am her slave. She has but to express a preference, for me to obey her wishes."

"Very well—" suddenly Violet had found her voice; driven to desperation, the gentle girl turned like a wild creature at bay—"obey me in this, then, Sir Israel Benjamin—never speak to me again! My father knows that I will not marry you—that I will kill myself, first!"

Both gentlemen laughed softly. M. Goldenough took a few spoonfuls of his Roman ice, glancing slyly at his friend, meantime; but making no other reply than that mocking laugh to the wild declaration of the daughter whom he delighted to torture. Presently he said:

"My dear, your ice has melted, and you have not tasted it. Come, we will go home to our apartments. You will need to rest and reflect. Sir Israel, will you walk with us?"

"No further to-night, thank you, M. Goldenough. I will see you in the morning, at eleven."

"Very well. We will arrange all the preliminaries to-morrow. Of course you understand, the affair is settled."

Violet arose as they did. It was with a violent effort that she prevented herself from screaming—from darting away and flinging herself into the first danger that appeared—anywhere, to get away from her companions. She restrained herself, for she said to herself, "If I am quiet, and try to think, perhaps I may escape the more certainly."

She was terribly frightened; yet conscious of a steely resolution to defy and thwart. For the first time in her innocent life she became crafty and cunning, under the pressure of a fearful need. When Sir Israel again attempted to take her hand, she gave it to him, but with her eyes cast down lest he should read their expression.

"Good!" he said, lifting the passive fingers to his lips; "you do not hate me so much as you pretend, mademoiselle. Good-night, and fine dreams. Cannot you wish me the same, my fair lady?"

"I wish you a good night's sleep, Sir Israel," she forced herself to answer.

"Ten thousand thanks, my beautiful bride-to-be."

"Violet," said M. Goldenough, as he conducted her along the cool, dimly-lighted street, after escaping the crowds in the park, "I wish

you would reconcile yourself at once to the marriage I have arranged for you. There is no use in resistance or rebellion. I have determined upon it—that is enough. Make any clamorous outcry or troublesome refusal, and I will clap you into the cell of a mad-house, from which you will never emerge until you are old and gray, if ever at all. Your friends will never have a hint of your place of concealment. You will be far worse than buried alive. You know that money can do anything. I shall use mine freely to secure a place for you in an institution, not far from here, on which I have my eye. I know that Sir Israel Benjamin is not exactly prepossessing; but I have chosen that you shall marry him; and you have nothing to do but submit."

"Have mercy upon me, father!" begged Violet, for the first time using the name "father" in addressing him. "Why do you seek to ruin my life?"

"Because your mother has ruined mine," was the answer, from between set teeth. "I took you from her to punish her—I hate you, as I hate her, and you shall not prosper if I can help it. Do not speak to me—be still! Not a word! No mercy is in my heart toward either of you. Let me warn you of one thing," he continued, pausing as they were about to enter their hotel—"to avoid all appearance of excitement—all strange actions, wild protestations, and nonsense generally. Each word and movement may be taken as proof, in case I enter complaint against you as a lunatic, of madness inherent in you. You cannot be too cautious."

It was true. She felt it, with sinking heart and icy veins. With no friend near—not one person who knew her antecedents—and with her own father to bring the complaint, she was powerless in his hands. She must make no appeal to the pity or mercy of others! She must not beg for help out of the hideous danger which encompassed her! An imprudent word might be the means of consigning her to a worse than living death! She went up the steps and through the wide passage, up the broad staircase and on into their rooms, without venturing to make any answer to the heartless threat of this unnatural parent.

Her blood ran cold at thought of being shut up with mad creatures in a strange country, far from hope, housed with despair—yet even that were preferable to marriage with that grizzly horror!

Her thoughts turned to Mr. Vernon and Charlie. Where was Charlie? Why had he not come to her rescue before this? He could not love her as she loved him or he would have found some way to trace her and watch over her welfare. M. Goldenough conducted her to her room, bowed, and turned the key on her. Why! even this habit of locking her up, had it been noticed by the servants or others, would be received as corroboration of the accusation of insanity, should he choose to make it!

All night Violet tossed on a couch of thorns. All night her persecutor tossed and sighed, as wakeful as she. Ethan Goldsborough did not like the manner of life he was living. It was foreign to his habits and distasteful to him in many ways. Yet he was in a frame of mind which demanded strong excitement to render life endurable. He could settle down to nothing. His wife was dead; he was severed from old friends; his pet, his Florence, was angry with him and hiding from him. He took a half-fiendish pleasure in driving Violet to despair; yet his conscience would not give him any peace for his conduct to her. He was like a dismantled ship, driven hither and yon by conflicting winds.

In consequence, he arose late the following morning, feverish, restless, eager to fly to the gaming-table. Ordering Violet to dress for the day as usual, they breakfasted in their sitting-room, and started for their haunt directly afterward. Eleven o'clock came and found M. Goldenough with the same run of bad luck which had commenced the previous evening. The more he lost, the larger the sums he staked on the next turn of the wheel. All the idle young men of the Spa dropped

into the hall and lingered, in an interested group, about the banker and his beautiful, veiled daughter.

The baronet came, spoke to him, tried to draw him away to talk over their arrangements for the marriage and tour; but M. Goldenough shook him off, impatiently, telling him he must wait. Hours rolled on. One set of loungers was replaced by another. Sir Israel fretted, fidgeted, and grew yellow with anger and nervousness, as he saw the gold raked in by the *croupier* which should have been his.

At last, even Violet, who had sat behind him, indifferent as a stone, only so that Sir Israel was kept from approaching her too closely, became uneasy at the flushed face, sparkling eyes and reckless manner of her father; her little white hand, soft as a petal from a lily, rested on his arm, and a dozen infatuated youths bent to catch the low murmur of her voice, as she asked him, in trembling tones, to come away.

"Yes, yes, presently," he responded, in a loud, bullying voice; "I hope, by heaven, you don't think I'm afraid to lose a little money. Let me alone. We Americans never back down! no, by George! I will sit here until my last dollar is gone, if I choose. Who is going to interfere? Do you suppose I am scared at the loss of a thousand or two pounds?—This is what I call jolly. Don't interfere with me, my girl."

Violet shrunk back in silence. Presently, however, she began to glance about her, through the folds of her thick veil, with more interest.

Sir Israel Benjamin had become either hungry or angry, and had, at last, gone off. M. Goldenough was so absorbed in play that she might leave the hall, and he remain unconscious of her absence for an hour.

Her heart began to throb wildly. What if she should attempt, this moment, to free herself? Was there the least hope of success? A five-franc piece was all the money in her purse. She had a few rings on her fingers; one of them was set with a diamond which her mother had given her. The stone was not large; but it might be worth two hundred francs. Then she had with her a pair of plain gold bracelets and ear-rings.

Her father had threatened, in case she made an attempt to leave him, to have her arrested and immured as a person of unsound mind. She ran a terrible risk in venturing flight, through an unfamiliar country—a friendless girl, exposed to a thousand perils.

Something of the heroism which had supported Madame D'Eglantine through years of trouble, was inherent in her daughter's nature. Violet, after a minute's hesitation, resolved to do what she could to escape the snare spread for her. She arose very quietly, glided out of the hall and into the pleasure-grounds, lying hot and still under the afternoon sun. She was followed, at once, by half a dozen impertinent young bloods, eager to watch the movements of *la belle Americaine*. She was going, perhaps, to a meeting in the park, with the gay but ancient baronet. A young English marquis even went so far as to speak to her—overtaking her by an effort—as she flew along an avenue of the gardens, looking for the most unrequented paths. Affecting not to hear him she walked on more rapidly. A few minutes brought her out on to a street full of small shops, at some distance from the one frequented by the baronet and other fashionable loungers. In the window of one of these shops she saw a sign, in French, that money was loaned on jewels and personal property; she went in and effected a bargain, by which the shopkeeper obtained articles worth about five hundred francs for half that sum; but she was more than satisfied, and in great haste.

Out she hurried, pursuing her flight with only one conscious plan—to take the meanest streets, where she would be least likely to be looked for. It was only because the autumn wind flaunted the garments in her very face, that she was led to enter another shop, in a Jew quarter, where second-hand clothing was kept for sale. She had not thought of disguise until the garments flapped in her face. A large woman advanced out of another room to meet her. Violet addressed her in French, and the

woman answered in a sort of *patois* of French and German; but they managed to understand each other pretty well.

The eyes of the dealer glistened when the young lady offered to exchange her rich clothing for the garments of a peasant-girl, with a basket holding a few pieces of lace, that she might pass for one of the lace-workers of the country.

"Come in here, my dear mademoiselle; you will be quite safe in this place until I make you one very good disguise," she said, eagerly, furtively feeling the thickness of Violet's black silk dress and counting up the price of her hat and costly mantle.

If any one saw the elegant demoiselle enter the poor shop they did not see her come out; but in about twenty minutes there emerged a young peasant-woman, in short petticoats, a laced bodice, wooden shoes, a high, broad hat, and with a lace-maker's basket on her arm.

The mistress of the shop had directed her how to find the railroad station, which was not far away, and toward it the wooden shoes went softly clattering.

As a train moved out of that station with the peasant lace-maker in a third-class car, Mr. Goldenough, at the sporting salon arose, with an oath and a laugh, from the table on which he had placed the last gold piece of all he had won in the month of his success: "We are just even," he said to the *croupier*. "Well! to-night we will take a new start. I never give up—it isn't in the blood," and then he looked about for the patient daughter who usually sat at his elbow—looked about, stared, grew as pale as he had been flushed, and went quickly off. Sir Israel Benjamin met him on the steps, they exchanged a few words, and walked into the gardens.

CHAPTER XV.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

CHARLIE WARD went the third time to see the policeman whom he had bribed before he received any information in return for his money; but on this third visit he was rewarded by the name and address of the lady whom he had seen riding out with the gentleman called by the officer Mr. Harold.

"I reckon there's something uncommon interesting about the affair, anyhow," remarked the man as he gave Charlie a card on which he had scrawled "Mrs. Fraser, No. 124 West—st." "I'm afraid Mr. Harold's been and gone an' got himself into another scrape. He's always in trouble with the fair sect. I've found out that the lady lives very quietly at this house, No. 124, as his wife. The lady who lets them the rooms only knows 'em by the name of Fraser—that's his given name, you see!—and she don't believe they're really married. As to that I can't say—I only know Mr. Harold ain't reckoned a marrying man, and that he keeps very still about it, if he is married."

"What is the name of the person who keeps the house?"

"Madame Florian. She's as tight as if she belonged to the detective force. I don't believe you'll get anything out of her. I've had a regular time finding out the little I tell you."

"I hope I am mistaken in the identity of the lady—that this Mrs. Fraser may prove to be quite another person. But I am greatly obliged to you; and here is the additional fifty dollars you have earned."

"Thank you, sir; and if I can serve you any further let me know."

Charlie turned away from the officer with a heavy heart, which was so evident upon his frank features that the man, as he carefully disposed the greenback in his wallet, said to himself:

"Pretty bad case o' broken heart, that! Harold has cut him out with the girl. That Harold's a gay one, now, ain't he? I wouldn't want him to get in my way if I was one o' them young swells."

It was dusk when young Ward received the address from the policeman, and going to his boarding-house for his dinner, he had an hour for deliberation as to what steps he should now

take. He felt almost absolutely certain that this Mrs. Fraser was Florence. The fear that she had already made shipwreck of her young life pained him almost as keenly as if she had been his own sister. In his mind she had always been associated with Violet; and both were near and dear and sacred to him. But, whatever had befallen Florence, it remained important for him to find her: poor Violet's restoration to her mother appeared to depend on Ethan Goldsborough's obtaining information of his daughter, and her receiving a gift from Madame D'Eglantine of one hundred thousand dollars. Charlie's feelings were of a most conflicting kind. He both hoped and feared the lady would prove to be Florence—hoped it, on Violet's account—feared it, on her own.

As soon as he concluded his nearly untasted dinner he went over to Sixth avenue, and took an up-town car to the street named on the card. His pulse throbbed unpleasantly in his temples as he rung the bell. A servant—a keen-looking mulatto-girl—came to the door. He asked for Mrs. Fraser.

"Not at home, sah."

"Can I see Madame Florian?"

"Not at home, sah."

Charlie knew the girl was lying—for he walked up and down on the opposite side of the street for ten minutes and had seen the apartments on the second floor brilliantly lighted, while the shadow of a slender figure, walking restlessly about, had fallen more than once on the curtains. He stepped into the hall, having almost to thrust the servant before him, as she kept the door in her hand, purposely barring his entrance. Charlie cast a quick glance up the stairway; he was certain he saw a little form leaning over the railing in the dusk of the upper hall where the gas was turned down.

"I wish to see Mrs. Fraser very much. I have important news for her," he said, in clear, elevated tones meant for the ear above.

"It is Charlie!" cried a silvery voice which thrilled through him. "Oh, Charlie! Charlie! How glad I am! Natalie, show Mr. Ward up this minute. He is an old friend of mine, and I must see him."

"Please to walk up," said the mulatto, with a wicked smile. "If missus counterdemand my orders it's all right," and the visitor sprang up the velvet-covered stairs with the same boyish eagerness with which he used to bound up the steps of Mr. Vernon's piazza to meet the two girls who so often walked together there.

A little figure stood in the open doorway of the brightly-lighted drawing-room—a little figure well-known to the eager eyes of the caller; and a little hand grasped his own warmly, a well-known voice murmured words of welcome, and Florence—the pretty little Florence of his student dreams—drew him into the magnificent apartment and closed the door between themselves and the over-curious servant.

Charlie could not speak for more than a minute. It was Florence, grown strangely beautiful, and robed in all the splendor of some fairy princess. The room was luxurious with costly furniture and perfumed with the breath of lavish quantities of flowers. She stood in the midst of her superb surroundings, under the blaze of the branching chandelier, smiling at him with tears in her eyes. Her ruby-colored dress flowed away behind her in a long train; her lovely neck and arms—not fair, but smooth as satin, and of the rich tint of the true brunette—sparkled with jewels; a cluster of red blossoms nestled in her dusky, silken hair. Her great eyes glowed with the excitement of meeting an old friend; but they filled quickly with tears, too, as she said:

"Oh, Charlie, how delightful it is to see some one that I know—an old friend—and from Lycurgus—dear old Lycurgus! But I thought, when I heard the bell ring, it was Fraser—my husband—and I sprang out into the hall. If you had come up-stairs then, you would have had my arms about your neck by mistake," she added, forcing a laugh.

"Your husband?" asked Ward, gravely.

"Yes, Charlie, I don't wonder you are astonished. I have been married six weeks to-day! Perhaps Fraser will come in while you are here; I hope he will, though he does not like me

to have company. He wants me all to himself, I suppose," she said, smiling, as she brushed away two great tears about to fall. "Sit down, and tell me everything."

She gave him a comfortable arm-chair, drawing a smaller one close in front of him where she might watch his lips as well as hear his words. Poor, homesick child! Fraser had not been near her for three days, and her heart was breaking under its silk and jewels; the sight of Charlie brought back, in a torrent, a thousand memories of the old life, the old home.

"Tell me first," she said, leaning toward him like an eager child, "have you heard anything of papa and mamma? I am very angry with papa, as you know; but I would give the world to see my mother. Is she in Lycurgus still?"

"Did you not see the advertisements I published a week or two ago?"

"No, no! If I had, I would have answered them. I am no longer hiding—except to please Fraser. You see, Charlie," blushing and hesitating, "our marriage is a profound secret, and must be kept so for the present—on Fraser's account. But tell me about my mother. Sometimes I wish I never had left her as I did. But oh, Charlie, the blow was so sudden and cruel, and I was so proud! How did poor mamma bear it?"

A lump rose in the throat of foolish, boyish Charlie. It was hard to tell the eager questioner that her mother was lying in the grave to which trouble had driven her—harder to listen to the daughter's sobs, and cries of self-reproach, after he had broken as gently as possible the news to her.

"Wipe your eyes, dear Florence—do not sob so—listen to what I have to say. I came here to tell you of many things," he said, after she had given way to a wild burst of grief, lasting half an hour.

"Alas!" she replied, with a more tempestuous outburst of feeling, "I am all alone, Charlie—miserable, desperate! Fraser has not been near me for three days, and my mother is dead!"

Florence had no intention of betraying her husband's neglect—pride would have sealed her lips before Charlie—but in the agony of this new sorrow, it was wrung from her without her will.

Ward sprang from his chair, walking up and down the room in great excitement. At last he paused before the weeping girl.

"Florence, excuse so dreadful a question. As your friend—your protector, if need be, I ask it. I heard things before I came here which your confession of his neglect seems to corroborate. Are you sure that this Mr. Harold has not deceived you?—that your marriage is valid in the eye of the law?"

Florence went to a little ebony casket on one of the tables, unlocked it and took from it her marriage certificate. She showed this to Charlie, and told him the whole story of her stay in Mr. Rhodes' house, her acquaintance with his friend Harold, and the wedding which followed. She did not even conceal—although she softened—the fact that to Mr. Rhodes' interference in her behalf she owed it that she was Harold's wife. "The clergyman," she said, "was one of eminent respectability, and so is Mr. Rhodes one of the most esteemed gentlemen in the city. It is all right—only Fraser feels that his father will be angry, and the old gentleman being very ill, he does not care to vex him."

"I am afraid," she continued, presently, with an air of the deepest melancholy, "that Fraser never really loved me—it was a passing fancy on his part, and he has already repented of his infatuation. He belongs to a very rich, very exclusive, very haughty family, which, he knows, will scorn me for my poverty and insignificance. But I do not care for his friends! I would curl my lip at them as haughtily as they at me, if Fraser only loved me. Oh, Charlie, what shall I do to keep the love which is slipping away from me? I would read, study, practice my music, make a gospel of the decrees of fashions, an art of dress—I would make any effort, perform any work, if thereby I might hold his affections. For I love him—I love him! I adore him! I would be the most

devoted little wife the world ever saw if he would only allow it. I would fit myself for the company of his proud relatives. It is hard to be situated as I am! Charlie, I am an honest, pure, loving wife; yet the very servants sneer at me. They do not believe I am that gentleman's wife; and he allows them to regard me as not his wife! When I watch for him, and he does not come, and I grow pale, and my eyes red with weeping, they smile at my misery, as much as to say, 'You should have expected this; you must reap what you sow.' They bring up elegant dinners; but when I have to sit down to them alone I cannot eat; and they take them away with an air of amusement. It is true, as he says, that he cannot come so often as he would like, without betraying his marriage to those from whom he wishes to conceal it. But I am sure he could visit me more frequently if the wish were as strong as it once was. I wonder have I grown ugly in these six weeks! He used to rave about my beauty. Charlie, tell me the truth!—have I grown plain, homely, deformed, since you saw me last? Am I no longer beautiful?—no longer fit to be loved?"

She stood before him with her hands clasped, a look of piteous appeal in the lovely eyes whose dark lashes were beaded with tears, a picture of girlish charms as vivid as ever fired the soul of a painter. The color rushed into Charlie's face as he spoke, impetuously:

"You are twenty times more beautiful than ever, Florence! This man, who dares to neglect you so, is a scoundrel. I would like to kill him."

"No—for then you would kill me, too. Good or bad I love him as he is. If I could but make him love me!"

"I have other things to tell you, Florence. Sit again, and let us have our talk out. We may not meet again for some time."

They resumed their seats, and her visitor narrated all that happened to the Vernons and Madame D'Eglantine, including, of course, the story of Violet's abduction by her father, his threats and the conditions upon which she was to be restored to her mother.

"So you see, Florence, that it is necessary I shall immediately inform Mr. Blank of your address, that he may confer with Mr. Goldsborough. Also, you will not be such a penniless bride, after all! Your portion will be a handsome one to bring, even to a Harold. You need have no doubt that Madame D'Eglantine will pay it, for she is quite willing—more than willing. Indeed, now that your own mother is dead, I dare say, had you not married, she would at once have adopted you as Violet's sister, and made you share in everything equally with her. I cannot but regret your rash marriage. But it is done, and cannot be undone. I only hope that Mr. Harold will be more willing to acknowledge you when he learns that you are to have a large sum of money, and that some, at least, of your friends and relatives are more than a match for his own in heritage and wealth."

"Your marriage must now be proclaimed, whether or not it suits Mr. Harold, senior. Servants shall no longer sneer at you. You have friends who will compel some attention to your interests. I only wish Mr. Vernon were here in the city now."

Much more was said. A marvelous clock on the carved mantelpiece struck ten, with a sound almost as soft as that of a summer breeze running through a branch of lilies of the valley.

"I had no idea I had been here almost three hours," exclaimed young Ward, rising quickly. "Good-by, dear Florence, for the present. You shall not be neglected, rest assured of that! And now, to attend to a small matter of interest only to myself. You remember the promise into which you bewitched me, when you got me to promise to wear your ring? We have met again, and I am no longer under bonds to wear a jewel which has made me a good deal of trouble, for it has kept Violet from promising to some day be my little wife. She was, naturally, jealous of my right to make love to her and yet wear your ring. When I see her again—which I fervently hope will now be

soon—I shall show her the absurdity of her doubts. So now, Charlie dear, take back your naughty ring."

As she reached out her hand for it, Charlie took the dimpled member in his own, playfully, and placed the ring on her finger. He had only the most brotherly feeling for the little lady with whom he had jested, and associated since since they were children; and now, it was more out of pity for her, and a kind desire to leave her in lighter spirits than he had found her, that he himself placed the ring on her hand, and smiling, touched his lips lightly to it as he said "good-night, and good-by till we meet again."

Turning to go, he, for the first time, perceived, in the door, a person who had been silently standing there for some three or four minutes; a person he immediately knew to be Fraser Harold, and whom he would have been glad to succeed in meeting, had it not been for an expression on the handsome face which startled and disconcerted him.

The sneer of a Mephistopheles was on the polished, courtly features; but the eyes were red and lurid with jealous rage.

"Really, madam, if I had known how you amused yourself in my absence, I need not have put myself so much out of the way to come up here to prevent your becoming quite desolate. It was at some inconvenience I managed to visit you this evening; but I have been so well entertained during the last five minutes, I will now depart, leaving you to the resources of a new lover. Farewell, Madame Cora Pearl."

"Fraser!" shrieked his wife, darting to him and flinging her arms about his neck. "You shall not speak to me so! You shall not go away! Listen! This is an old friend of mine—let me tell you"—but he cast her from him with so much rudeness that she staggered half-across the room.

"I might have known that a girl who would meet me as you did, in Gramercy park, was not a girl to trust," he said, coldly. "I have had enough of you. I have been thinking so for some time; and now I am infinitely obliged to you for giving me a palpable and sufficient reason for putting an end to our acquaintance. You are even more fickle than I deemed you."

He turned to leave the room, but again she rushed and flung herself upon him, dragging him, by the might of her passion and anguish rather than by her physical strength, back against his will, while Charles Ward, brave and generous, if young and inexperienced, quickly closed the door and placed his back to it.

"You shall listen to my explanation of what you have seen—for your wife's sake," said Charlie, sternly.

"Do not bore me with explanations; they are my pet aversions," answered Harold, keeping the struggling girl at arm's length and advancing calmly to the door. "Open that, and let me pass, or I shall take great pleasure in blowing out your brains."

"Blow them out, if you will, you infernal sneak and coward!" cried Charlie. "It is what one might expect from a gentleman too mean to protect his own wife from the insults of the servants who wait upon her. To assassinate an unarmed man were not so base as to murder the reputation of a woman!—above all things of the woman you have vowed before Heaven to love and protect."

Gentleman Harold quailed perceptibly under this true charge; the hand which toyed with his revolver did not bring it to view; but he sneered still, as he asked, with forced quietness:

"Who asserts this lady to be my wife? She will have some trouble to prove her claims to the title."

"Fraser! Fraser! Fraser! You pierce my very soul with your cruel words. How can you talk so to your own, own fond little wife! Mr. Rhodes will tell Charlie my words are true—so will the clergyman. I have the certificate. Fraser Harold, I will endure this false position no longer!—to-morrow morning I go to your parents, your sisters, and tell them the truth."

"You will find it difficult to make them be-

lieve it," he still sneered. "I cannot help to-night, my girl, because I was still very fond of you; and who knows what your power over me might have won me to do? That is all over now. The sight I saw when I came in the door decided my course. Redmond Rhodes sailed for Europe a week ago, to be gone two years; the reverend gentleman you refer to fell dead on the street, to-day, of apoplexy; my family is at our country house; and I am off, to-morrow, with a lot of English swells, for a hunt over the plains—so good-by, forever."

He turned quickly, walked down the room into the adjoining one, out into the hall from thence and down the stairs before Charlie could intercept him.

As she heard the hall door clang, Florence fell headlong to the floor, with the low cry:

"Oh, merciful Heaven, DESERTED!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LACE-MAKER AND THE TOURIST.

REDMOND RHODES felt a strange weariness of life after he had seen the little refugee safely married to her too gay lover. He could not account for the *ennui* which pursued him at Newport—traveled with him to Saratoga—stuck by him closer than a brother at Lake George, and made with him the whole tour of the White Mountains, arriving simultaneously with him in Newport again. He was not usually the victim of blue devils to any great extent, having within his own mind resources which even the deadly lethargy of luxury could not wholly repress. But now he was listless, restless, tired of everything, unable to content himself anywhere. He came home again in four weeks. For the first time he seriously regretted having chosen a bachelor's life. His house was insufferably lonesome. His books had lost their charm. The pictured beauties who smiled down at him from the gallery were stiff, unnatural, faded shadows on canvas as compared with the lovely, vivid, piquant face that had once flashed back a startled blush and smile at him, as he opened his chamber door. Ah, mysterious witchery of woman's eyes! A pair of them—"sweetest eyes 'twere ever seen"—had entered the haughty bachelor's halls, cast the glamour of their brightness over everything, and disappeared, leaving dullness, gloom, homesickness.

Redmond Rhodes did not say all this to himself—would not have acknowledged it to his own dreams; yet in this was the secret of the sudden resolution to bid farewell to New York for the winter, and to seek in Paris, or the sunny cities of Italy, the pleasure which had forsaken his hearth-stone. His house was closed; his housekeeper pensioned off, with no duties except to see to an occasional airing of the rooms; his wild friend, Harold, was delicately lectured on—"now you are married, you must be good;" and Mr. Rhodes, with no particular feeling of elation, but with rather the inward reflection that "the world was hollow and his doll stuffed with sawdust," found himself outward bound on the Germania, for Bremenhaven; having resolved on an autumn tour through Germany and Switzerland before settling down in Paris for two or three months of the winter.

Too reserved in temperament to make any of those intimacies common to steamer journeys—where the passengers are forced into a closer companionship than in other modes of traveling—Mr. Rhodes yet became very much interested in a certain Madame D'Eglantine, a French lady of exquisite beauty and refinement, reported to be rich almost beyond figures to compute. Her wealth and beauty made her an universal object of interest; but it was for neither of these very objective qualities that Mr. Rhodes fancied her; he saw, in her shrinking from the homage paid her, in the pallor of her fair face, the shadows under her melancholy eyes, and the pathetic tones of her low voice, that she was a woman who had suffered. Something in her looks and manners attracted his sympathy.

As he was a gentleman whose air proclaimed his right to be respected and trusted, Madame D'Eglantine did not repel the few quiet courtesies he found it in his power to extend to her. Sometimes they chatted pleasantly together for

an hour on deck, on fair mornings or calm evenings. Mr. Rhodes also liked madame's business agent, Mr. Vernon—an honest, sensible, modest gentleman, well-read in the classics, and a shrewd observer of men and things—though he wondered a little at her trusting such immense interests to a man of so limited an experience. Mr. Rhodes did not know the reasons—aside from business ones—which the fair French madame had for trusting the American lawyer with her affairs.

Mr. Rhodes was the only one on board the ship, aside from the agent, to whom Madame D'Eglantine spoke of her daughter; not even to him did she confide any of the particulars of her story; but he gathered from her the impressions that she had been very unfortunate in her marriage, contracted in secrecy when she was scarcely more than a child, and that the man who had been her husband held still the power to torture her, by keeping, or having at present, possession of their child—that she was now on her way to claim this daughter, a young lady, and was in some doubt as to where she should find her. So much, Redmond inferred, from what was told him; but the real and terrible tragedy of our story, the danger which threatened her innocent daughter, were not dreamed of by the gentleman who so sympathized with the pale-faced, lovely mother. And so the brief acquaintance terminated with a few pleasant wishes that they might meet again, when the steamer reached her dock at Bremenhaven, for the ways of the travelers separated there. Madame D'Eglantine was going directly to Baden, led by some strange, motherly yearning which drew her as a mysterious, magnetic force. Ah! if she had been a week earlier on her way, and could have come unannounced by the tell-tale cable, how easily she would have at least found her child, and been able to keep near her, even if not to buy her from the malignant hate which kept possession of her only to torment!

Before madame reached Baden those of whom she came in search had flown. But she learned how a Monsieur Goldenough had been there for a few weeks—at what house he stopped—how he spent his days—and how his beautiful daughter, *la belle Americaine*, had been the marvel of the city, followed about by a host of idle young bloods, who considered themselves repaid for hours of patient waiting, if, perchance, she flung back her veil for a few moments, as she sat near her father at his play, while her soft, pure eyes roved over the *habitat* of fashion, pleasure, dissipation, like the glance of an angel brooding sadly over some entrance to the Inferno.

She heard, too, vague rumors, flying reports, of something which sent the blood back on her brain in curdling waves, which threatened to kill—a scandalous story which had been the delight of the halls and gardens for the last three or four days: how M. Goldenough had found a suitor for his daughter's hand—the well-known English baronet, Sir Israel Benjamin, famous for his meanness, badness and ugliness—old, repulsive, rich, sensual, miserly; how the young lady had objected, and the papa had insisted; how *la belle Americaine*, driven to desperation, had run away; how the banker and the baronet had soon found the trail, and were off, silent, keen, cunning, rather enjoying the novelty of the excitement, and certain to run down the game very soon.

"What more?" gasped the agonized lady, of the one who had enlightened her thus far, striving in vain to conceal the tumult of suspense and pain which whirled through her brain.

"Ah, madame, they do say mademoiselle was married to Sir Israel, day before yesterday. 'Tis a pity, for the baronet is a despicable person, though rich enough, the good God knows. Any one of a hundred handsome and amiable young men, of good families, would have been glad to marry *la belle Americaine*, since her father was so fast to get rid of her. Some of the young Englishmen went about with *crêpe* on their arms yesterday—it was only half in jest they were, either—and a poor jest I call it, madame, do not you?"

"How do they know about the marriage?"

"Oh, it is but a rumor; yet it is generally believed. They say they found her in a little country inn about five miles from —. Monsieur Goldenough seems to have had great authority over his daughter, for she gave up, when once caught, and became most obedient, going to the mayor and the church, the next morning, as meek as a mouse."

"You speak as if well-informed."

"I only cho the rumors which are in every one's mouth, madame. It may be so, or may not be."

And this was the welcome which awaited Madame D'Eglantine in Baden!

Mr. Vernon was equally distressed. His love for Violet was that of the fondest of parents; he had long indulged a favorite dream that she and Charles Ward would join hands and hearts and together be the comfort of his declining years. Even after her mother had come, with dazzling prospects which made the fair girl the peer of nobles, he still clung to his first plans for her happiness, believing that some time Madame D'Eglantine would be won to think as well of Charlie as he did. The idea of his shrinking Violet forced into a marriage with a *blase*, mean, unprincipled old baronet was terrible; far rather would he have heard that the earth had closed over her sweet eyes forever.

Meantime, their whilom traveling companion, Redmond Rhodes, pursued his leisurely way up the river on one of the little steamers, which go loaded down with passengers, in no hurry for anything, and with no object in view except to get rid of the time comfortably, and to see as much of the country as was convenient. He had been over the ground more than once before, so that nothing had the charm of novelty. He had purchased a pocket edition of Goethe in the German, and enjoyed the reading of one of his favorite poets as he glided gently up the Rhine. Toward evening he left the boat, allowing his baggage to go on, except a small traveling-bag which he had sent up to the quaint old inn of the quaint old town where he proposed to spend the night. He had a pleasant sunset hour in which to examine the cathedral, and another more dusky one in which to rove about the place looking at everything different from the customs of his own country, with keen eyes; his long walk gave him a good appetite; he ate a solitary supper with a zeal which would have astonished James at home; slept well under the quilts of down which heaped the high bed in the comfortable but old-fashioned chamber of the inn, and awoke the next morning, rather dazed as to his whereabouts, out of a dizzy dream of a pair of velvety black eyes opening softly inside a Quaker bonnet.

The hours began to drag in the dull old town before it was time to expect the steamer in which he was to resume his trip up the river; he sauntered down to the little stone quay to see the arrival of the boat from above going down. He had his bag in his hand; for he had settled his bill at the inn and was ready for a start.

The passengers coming off were a commonplace lot of Germans; but, on the deck, Redmond observed, as the steamer lay at the dock a few minutes, were some picturesque tourists, as well as some terribly stupid-looking ones. Quite by herself, on one of the benches on the deck, in a timid attitude, as if she shrunk from her own shadow, sat a peasant girl, young and pretty. The sparkle of a tear in the sunlight, as it fell from her eyes to her hand, first drew the attention of our idle traveler to her. She wore the costume of a Belgian peasant, except that her hat had a broad brim which so shadowed her face that Redmond could only make out a delicate chin, a mouth like a rose, and the tip of a dainty nose.

"That is no peasant's face," he idly mused; "above all things, not the swarthy face of a Belgian girl," and then his eyes roved to the small white hands clasped over the handle of the basket which held her lace-work; and from thence to the fairy feet in the wooden shoes—soft, fair, dimpled, rose-leaf little feet, without

stockings, trying to hide themselves in the rude pattens which were far too heavy for the feet.

"Here is some more foolish masquerading!" he thought, memory flying back to the little Quakeress, with the false front and the painted wrinkles, who had once upon a time fainted on his door-step. "This little girl is crying, too. Perhaps she has been in good circumstances and is now reduced to the pittance of a lace-maker, poor young thing!" and Redmond, with the aid of a ready imagination, went on to construct a story to suit the fancied circumstances.

Just before the boat proceeded on her way, a belated traveler was driven in a cab down to the dock, at a furious rate of speed; the cabman jumped down, but not soon enough to open the door for the gentleman who sprung out, flung his fare in the man's face and hurried on to the steamer. Redmond had turned to watch the little scene, as one will who has nothing better to do: when he again looked back at the peasant girl, he noticed that the little rosy mouth was pale, and the slender figure seemed to wish to sink into the deck and escape all human sight; the fingers folded lightly over the handle of the basket had broken it in the sudden, convulsive movement which passed over them. For a moment, as the arriving gentleman disappeared under the gangway, she arose and looked about with an air of such distraction, such terror, that the observer on the dock expected to see her rush to the side of the boat and cast herself headlong into the water. As the head of the new arrival emerged above the floor of the deck, on his way up, she sunk back again despairingly, drew her hat still further over her face, opened the lid of the basket, and took out a cushion and bobbins over which she bent as if deeply engrossed in work.

The bell of the steamer sounded the signal to draw in the plank.

One would have to be in just such a frame of mind as Redmond Rhodes to appreciate the impulse which came over him at that critical moment—he was tired of everything, longing for something to arouse his interest, time was of no consequence, he had no settled plans—and so, as the bell jangled, he set his foot on the plank and sprung into the gangway. To do him full justice we must also admit that the chivalry of a most generous nature had been touched by the sight of the evident terror of the young lace-maker.

"If she needs a friend, why not I, as well as any one?—I am bound to see this little by-play through."

And there was our haughty aristocrat, who, at home, held himself "too good for human nature's daily food," going back down the glorious, romantic Rhine on the same track he had yesterday passed over, just to see what was the trouble with a foolish peasant girl, who had dropped a tear, and broken her basket-handle in a spasm of sudden fright! Redmond would not have done such a thing had there been any who knew him to observe it; but, being quite free to act out his natural impulses, he was not abashed at the nobility of his intentions nor ashamed to do a good act.

Going on deck, he placed himself at some distance from the peasant girl, took out his copy of Goethe, and began to read and watch.

In a few minutes he heard a suppressed exclamation; the gentleman whose appearance on the dock had so startled the girl had been walking up and down the deck, with a hideous leer on his countenance, looking narrowly at the peasant every time he passed; she had not once looked up, but held her head bent low over her work. Seldom had Mr. Rhodes seen a face so utterly repulsive to him as that of this man; it was old, without any of the benignity of age, a wrinkled page covered over with the ineffable records of a mean and sensual life; the loose under lip was significant of the character of the man, as well as the small, crafty eyes. His dress was that of a seedy exquisite; his figure bent and low. While the American mutely wondered as to his name and standing, he heard two English tourists sitting near him begin a discussion of the very subject, which enlightened him considerably. One of them remarked, in an undertone:

"There's our old friend, Sir Israel, again. I wonder what he is after now. Something of importance, or he never would have jumped out of that cab in such haste."

"Ten to one it's that pretty Belgian peasant! Do you see how he eyes her? When Sir Israel Benjamin is in a hurry you may know that he is either after a pretty woman or a rich fool. There! I told you so! He is about to purchase a piece of lace—for a pocket-handkerchief," and the tourists laughed.

It was just at this point that Mr. Rhodes had heard the girl's smothered cry; and now he noticed that her hands trembled as she removed the lid from her basket and allowed Sir Israel to inspect its contents. The baronet said something to her—made quite a long speech, in a voice too low for Redmond to catch a word—added, in a louder tone, that he would buy a cravat of her presently—and passed on, evidently desirous of avoiding the suspicions of those on the boat who might know him.

The girl sat for some time after the baronet left her as if in a stupor. Then she pushed her hat a little up from over her eyes and looked about on the people. It seemed as if she looked for some one who might befriend her. When her glance at last rested on Redmond, a slight flush came into her pale face; her eyes passed on, but they came back to him, questioningly, again and again.

His curiosity and interest increased. This was no peasant girl. Two hours passed on without any incident, except the occasional call of the little steamer at some village dock; the passengers were called to dinner in the cabin; Sir Israel, the tourists, the commercial travelers, all went—except the common people who ate their bread and cheese on deck, the peasant, and Redmond Rhodes. Redmond remained where he was—he had breakfasted late, and he longed for an opportunity to speak alone with the girl. She did not wait for him to address her; no sooner had Sir Israel disappeared than she arose and came over to the bench where he was sitting, holding her basket open as an excuse for addressing him.

"You are an American, sir?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"I am—and you?"

"Oh, yes! and in trouble. I am not—not—I am running away in this disguise, sir; but, indeed, I am not to blame for it. If my mother could know how I am situated!—oh, sir, as an American and a gentleman I appeal to you!"

"Be calm, my dear young lady, and tell me what you wish, as if I were your brother. Consider me as such; ask my assistance in any way; I shall be only too happy to serve you."

"Oh, if I could tell you all! I trust you, sir, for your face tells me that it is safe to do so. I hoped to reach the steamer and sail for New York, before my pursuers discovered me; but, alas one of them is on this boat with me, and I am suffering all the horrors—"

"Hush," interrupted Redmond, in a whisper, "he is coming. No, my girl, I do not care to buy. I am no judge of lace."

The girl looked over her shoulder, at this hint, and there stood the grinning baronet, so close that his breath touched her cheek—so close that she shivered with terror as she saw the cold triumph, the gleam of malice, in his crafty black eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SNARE HOLDS AND TIGHTENS.

WHEN M. Goldenough turned away from the gaming-table where he had lost in twenty-four hours all that he had gained in four weeks of extraordinary good luck, and encountered Sir Israel at the door, with a question as to whether he knew where his daughter had gone, he found the baronet in an ill humor.

"Curse you and your daughter," too, monsieur; if you're going to play in this reckless manner, I'd better keep out of the family. You will ruin yourself, sooner or later, and then what will I get with my lady, but her good looks? She's deuced handsome; but one must look out for his interests, you know, for he can't expect another to look out for him. I'm ten fathoms deep in love with mademoiselle:

but soft words butter no parsnips; what is her dot and how secured?"

M. Goldenough took Sir Israel's arm and hurried him away to a quiet spot on the promenade; then he faced his friend, and with a sullen smile, asked him, curtly:

"Did you ever chance to hear anything of the estates of the D'Eglantines, in Caen?"

"An immensely wealthy family," answered the baronet, smacking his lips at the very thought of estates far exceeding his own.

"Well, now, I will confide a fact to you. You can act on the knowledge of the fact as you think best. My daughter Violet has no expectations whatever from me; but, on her mother's side, she is the sole prospective heir to every acre of those estates, every dollar of their income. Her mother is a D'Eglantine, and now sole owner of all the property. Violet is her only child, and indisputable successor. Judge for yourself whether it be worth some trouble to secure for a wife a young lady with such prospects."

Sir Israel's eyes twinkled like sparks that have been stirred.

"Has mademoiselle returned to your hotel?" he asked, with sudden interest.

"That is what I am anxious to ascertain. Will you come along?"

The reader knows they did not find the victim of their schemes there.

In the pursuit which followed the baronet proved himself a perfect ferret.

The business seemed perfectly congenial to his peculiar talents.

Then, urged on as he was by the fear of losing an heiress, the very prospect of whose riches made him half delirious with joy, he was better than a dozen hired detectives. The poor child had small chance of hiding herself from such pursuit.

Before dark they were in the second-hand clothing-store, where the woman at first lied obstinately from fear of losing the beautiful garments over which she had been gloating; but when assured that she would remain unmolested by the law, and was offered a handful of silver besides, she soon described the costume which the young lady had adopted, and told how she had directed her to the railway station.

M. Goldenough felt so sure of soon overtaking the fugitive that he would make no use of the telegraph or officers of the law, preferring to conduct his family affairs less publicly. The two men had given chase; but the timid creature they pursued had some wit to elude them; she had doubled on her track, and finally taken to the steamer, after actually seeing her father and the baronet on the train in a car of which she was sitting.

They had discovered their mistake too late to rectify it immediately; and had then resolved that M. Goldenough had better proceed to Bremerhaven and remain there on the lookout, as they had decided that she was making her way there, to sail for America. Meantime, the baronet, who had grown very uneasy over their mistake, undertook to overhaul the steamer at some landing-point of her passage, and keep his eye on mademoiselle until her father claimed her.

We have seen how well he succeeded. When first addressing the pretended lace-maker about her work, he was informing her of how delighted he was to have the opportunity of once more paying his respects to his fiancée and of the pleasure it would be to M. Goldenough to greet his daughter when she stepped from the boat.

"Monsieur Goldenough is not at all angry with your playful masquerading, mademoiselle; but it confirms him in his opinion that you will be safer with a husband than with a father; and he has promised to hand you over to my keeping before twelve o'clock to-morrow."

And Violet, feeling the toils tightening about her, was still conscious of one supreme resolution of her heart and soul—to die before permitting that creature to touch her hand. But how? She knew that it was not so easy to die on a wish. She must have the means at hand. Wistfully she looked at the blue water. If she

should attempt to drown herself and be rescued, she knew very well that a marriage or a mad-house would be her punishment. While thinking over the whole ground her desperate eyes had roved about in search of one kindly human being to whom it would seem tolerably safe to appeal. She saw Mr. Rhodes and recognized him as a fellow-countryman. Somehow, he seemed to inspire her with courage. Did some subtle, inexplicable influence from the mother who had so lately associated with him on board the Germania still linger about him, that Violet should so trust him at first glance and feel as if she had found a defender, who would believe her story and not swallow the fiction that she was mad, as soon as a wicked man chose to accuse her of it?

She would have told the stranger all; but the ever-watchful baronet, fearing that she might do something so rash as to throw herself over the side of the boat, had concluded to go dinnerless and returned in time to thwart her attempt at confidence. Stealing softly on the pair he overheard enough to convince him that mademoiselle was about to appeal to this gentleman, who was also an American, and he resolved that an opportunity should not again occur.

The hours of the afternoon wore slowly away, and the boat approached the end of her journey.

In vain Redmond Rhodes sought to interest himself in his favorite poet. The young lady in the peasant garb had taken a seat as near to him as she could. The baronet had joined the group; he tried to open a conversation with the American, as an excuse for remaining near, but got brief replies, and finally settled into silence, amusing himself with watching, with malignant pertinacity, every look and movement of the embarrassed and suffering girl. It was with difficulty Mr. Rhodes controlled himself, so strong was the impulse of the gentleman to chastise the bully who could thus stare out of countenance a lady.

The lovely dark-blue eyes finally fixed themselves on Redmond's with an anxious, strained, terrified appeal in them, which he felt that he must respond to.

"What is it, my child?" he asked, in his kind manner, feeling that he must wait no longer for the baronet to get out of the way. "If you need a friend, I will be one to you—you are a countrywoman of mine, and I cannot submit to see you persecuted."

"I do not see what you can do for her," interposed Sir Israel, drawing a card from his breast-pocket and handing it, with a polite bow, to the stranger. "Allow me to assure you, sir, whoever you are, that it will be dangerous for you to interfere between a father and his child—or a young lady and her affianced husband."

"I am not affianced to him," spoke up Violet, quickly—"I hate, abhor, dread him, beyond any man on the face of the earth! My father is determined that I shall marry him—I put on this disguise and ran away, because my father is cruel to me, and wishes to make me wretched for life by forcing me to accept this man, whom I detest. If I could reach my home and friends!—but, oh, sir, I fear I am quite in my father's power; and he was cruel to my mother, and has no love for me."

There were no passengers then in that vicinity who understood English, and the three could talk without exciting any especial notice. Sir Israel tapped his forehead significantly, and smiled.

"Her father is a gentleman against whom no one will venture a word. He is kindness itself to his daughter, who is one of the sweetest of her sex, except that, occasionally—when not so well as usual—she has, let us say, exaggerated fancies about things which render her in—"

"He means you to understand that I am more or less insane; that is a part of my father's avowed plan to compel me—in this foreign country, away from all who know me—to marry this man. Oh, do not believe them! do not allow that suspicion to poison your mind toward me! Do you, sir, blame me for shrinking with horror from this old man, who

has not one virtue to compensate for his burden of years? Would I not be insane to consent to such a union? Yet my father wants to hold me a prisoner, to force me into the arms of this withered *roue*! I am so mad, that I will die by the first death that offers before I will yield. If to be eager to kill myself to escape Sir Israel Benjamin, be madness, then I am mad, indeed!"

Sir Israel waved his hand deprecatingly, with a pitying smile.

"Will you not save me from them?" she asked, turning to Redmond, with clasped hands; "surely you can do something!"

"I wish I knew what I could do," answered Mr. Rhodes, thoughtfully; he was too experienced in the difficulties of the law, to feel willing to make the attempt to interfere between a parent and child, even had he possessed the least power to do so.

"Do something—something for me, if you have any humanity?" she pleaded. "I would leap into the water, but I know they would save me, and I shall be worse off than before. Sir, will you give me a scrap of paper out of your note-book, and a pencil, for one moment?"

Redmond tore a leaf out of his diary and handed it to her, with the pencil she had asked for. She immediately wrote a few words and handed paper and pencil back to him. The face of Sir Israel turned a sickly purple with rage and jealousy; he shook his long forefinger at the American, saying, savagely:

"Sir, this interference on your part has gone as far as I shall permit. When we reach our stopping-place, I shall hand you over to the police."

"On what complaint?" asked Redmond, coolly.

"No matter about that; I will invent one. I will swear to whatever is necessary to get rid of you, sir."

"What a fine sense of honor! But let me beg of you not to perjure yourself on my account. Rather than drive you into such a sin, I will abandon the young lady to her fate. We Americans are ridiculous cowards."

The old dandy could not decide whether the stalwart gentleman, whose broad shoulders loomed a foot higher than his own, was making fun of him, or not. Redmond arose and went to another part of the deck, where he read the few lines the girl had written, twisted the torn leaf carelessly and tossed it over board. From that moment until the time they landed he did not once look toward her; and the baronet sagely concluded that his threat had really frightened the puppy of an American.

Under this belief he recovered his equanimity, making himself so agreeable to the pretty lace-maker in the wooden shoes that every one on deck was smiling at the spectacle.

When the boat finally came alongside the dock which was the terminus of her day's journey, the rich purple of twilight had robed the distant mountains, and night was settling slowly over the strange town. Mr. Rhodes was in no hurry to disembark. He stood where he could watch the others do so, waiting for the first pressure to be over. Looking down upon the dock, where two lamps already glimmered, he saw a handsome, portly, eminently-respectable appearing personage, of his own nationality, eagerly scanning the passengers. Then he saw the old baronet signal this personage, who immediately made his way on board and up to the spot where the young lady, disguised as a lace-maker, sat trembling.

What passed between the two he did not attempt to overhear; but now made his own way quickly down upon the quay, where he purposely concealed himself behind a small mountain of freight, waiting and watching until the gentleman returned, with the pretended peasant girl on his arm. They entered a carriage, the baronet went in another, and both were driven off at a rapid rate. Rapid as it was a third carriage followed as swiftly—for gold will work wonders, and Mr. Rhodes had triple-feed the cabman.

The father did not take his beautiful daughter, dressed in her peasant clothes, to any hotel; but into the oldest, oddest part of the town,

close down by the shipping, where the carriage drove under the ancient *porte-cochere* of a tall, tumble-down building, and disappeared in the court-yard; an old building, standing forlorn in a sort of decayed grandeur, in the midst of a crowd of very different buildings, warehouses, tenement-houses, steamboat-offices, and the tag-end of a market.

Mr. Rhodes summoned his own driver to stop at a safe distance from the other two vehicles.

"What house is that whose court-yard they entered?"

"A lodging-house, monsieur—in a poor part, but clean and respectable. It was once very fashionable; but these latter years it is occupied chiefly by the clerks in the warehouses 'round about."

"Do you suppose I can obtain a room there for a day or two?"

"Oh, undoubtedly, monsieur. I am told the bedding is clean and the place quiet. But *Monsieur le Americaine* should go to a finer place."

"Give me the street and number, please."

The cabman gave it, and Redmond wrote it down.

"Now drive me to some office from which I can dispatch a telegram."

A drive of some length brought them to a handsome quarter of the town, where Mr. Rhodes sent his message, took his supper at a restaurant, and was driven back to the vicinity of the house where his acquaintances of the boat had taken refuge.

It was by this time quite late in the evening.

Dimissing the cab, he proceeded on foot, and rung the bell at the court-yard gate. The *portiere* made his appearance.

"Can I have an apartment here for a day or two?"

"Undoubtedly. Will monsieur walk in? Come this way—I will introduce you to the proprietress."

He was led across the court into the parlor of the little widow who had the letting of the apartments. She could give him his choice of several beautiful, charming suites; and she took up a candle and led the way up a neatly-kept, but somber and ancient stairway.

"Give me rooms as near as possible to those of the other Americans who arrived this evening," said Redmond, as he followed after her up the foot-worn stone stairs, dimly lighted by the one flaring candle which preceded him.

"Ah! monsieur," rejoined the widow, pausing at the first landing, and sighing heavily, "those people disappointed me cruelly. They looked at my rooms, but they were not suited, and went away, after I almost felt the price of them in my palm. I hope monsieur will not treat me so badly."

Foiled!

Redmond Rhodes drew a long breath, but checked the inclination to swear, as this certainty was borne in upon him. Those two men had been more cunning than he. Foreseeing that he would track them, they had led him off on a false trail.

"Do you know where they went to find apartments?"

"I have no more idea than I have of heaven, monsieur. But you will not disappoint me about the rooms?"

"If they suit, I will remain here for the present," a resolution on which Redmond afterward congratulated himself!

CHAPTER XVIII.

AU REVOIR.

DESERTED!

Terrible word for the wife of six weeks! When Florence came out of that deadly swoon, she saw, through the blackness which still partially obscured her vision, the cold, heartless glance of Madame Florian fixed upon her, and shrunk from it as from the sting of a reptile, reclosing her eyes and sinking back on the satin cushions of the sofa where she had been placed, with the one wish that she might never again have to open them and face a weary, wicked world.

But the boon of death, so often prayed for as

rashly as piteously, could not be hers for the asking. By her own vanity and folly—though not by any crime—she had opened the door to a long train of evils likely to pursue her through the whole of a life as yet so fresh and young. She had done wrong in coming to New York as she did—done wrong in meeting Fraser Harold surreptitiously, as she had done—done wrong in marrying him when she saw how he hesitated about making her his wife. The last fault was the most forgivable, because "she loved much"—that she *did* love her husband truly and with the whole of her ill-governed, passionate nature, was her redeeming virtue.

"I hope mademoiselle will make an effort to control herself; as, if she feels well enough to attempt it, I must insist on her leaving my house to-night. She knows that, had I not been imposed on, I should never have allowed her to take apartments here."

"Why do you call a married lady mademoiselle? And why do you speak to her in that insolent manner?" demanded young Ward, angrily: he had waited, in anxiety and distress, for Florence's recovery from her swoon.

"She can answer that question better than I can. When her protector leaves her, because of the visits of another gentleman, I think I am justified in giving the lady warning."

"That man, who *should* have been her protector, and is not, is her husband, madame; and I am an old friend of her family who have known her since she was a child in frocks. I came to her to bring her word of her mother's death. Beware! there are courts where foul-mouthed slander is punished; as I, a lawyer, chance to know. That her husband should have gone off in a fit of jealous rage, because he saw me here, without waiting for an explanation of my visit, shows him to be—what he is. But it does not make it safe for you to insult this lady."

"Very well, sir; I have no wish to insult her, as you call it. You will not deny my right to ask her to vacate my apartments, after the gentleman who engaged them for her has told me that he will no longer be responsible for the price of them?"

"Certainly not. But," after a minute's reflection, "they are paid for in advance; you cannot turn her out to-night; and I do not propose to seek another place for her at an unreasonable, suspicious hour."

"They are paid for by the week; there are yet two days remaining. I did not think of that; I thought only of the reputation of my house," quickly rejoined the wily madame, afraid that this gentleman might find out the truth, *viz*: that Mr. Fraser, as he met her in the lower hall, had tossed a handful of bills to her, saying: "Here is a month's pay in advance; allow Mrs. Fraser to remain here that length of time;" for Harold—who had all the baseness of his class—had also their scorn of meanness in money matters.

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie!" moaned the deserted wife, again striving to lift her head from the cushions where she lay, like some splendid flower which has been gathered, admired, and tossed aside to wilt and die, "this is horrible! Do not let that woman look at me—speak to me! Oh, to think that Fraser can subject me to such treatment! Charlie, it is more than I can bear! It makes me *hate* him! As it made me hate my father, to find out what he was and how he had treated my mother, it makes me hate Fraser. Come! I will go away from here to-night. I will go in the Quaker dress and bonnet in which I came to this wicked city. I will not wear a thing he has given me—I will not eat another mouthful of food for which he has paid! Never! I will not! I will not!" She had staggered to the floor, and stood there, in one of her old, characteristic attitudes, stamping her tiny foot, while the dark eyes blazed in the white face.

"I don't wonder you feel so, dear Florrie," said Charlie, soothingly, gently forcing her to sit down, "and you shall go away from here as quickly as possible; but not to-night. It is already after ten o'clock. If Madame D'Eglantine had not gone abroad, I should have a motherly friend to whom I could take you."

"Oh, not to *her*, either!" cried Florence, shuddering.

"Yes, to her. I know that she would gladly be a mother to you—and Violet a sister. I only wish they were here."

Florence turned her face to the wall: she had cherished a feeling of resentment, dislike, envy, toward those two; to accept favors from them would be intolerable! Her own mother was dead—she felt herself utterly friendless on the face of the earth, except for Charlie Ward, whom she half despised. Her situation, in her own eyes, was even more terrible than it was in reality, though unhappy enough at the best. To die—to die!—that was all she wanted, in the first bitter hour of her mocked love, her injured pride, her desolation. She turned her face to the wall in silence, rejecting the very idea that Violet, or Violet's mother, could be any help to her.

"Well, I will say good-night, Mrs. Fraser," added Charlie, after waiting in vain for her to speak. "I will call at nine in the morning, and to-morrow I hope to find some safe and pleasant home for you—even if you have to return to Lycurgus to obtain it," and he went away.

"Good-night, Mrs. Fraser; I hope you feel better; and if you are ill, or need anything, call me, and I will be ready to serve you," and Madame Florian, thinking she might have been unwisely in haste to get rid of her patron, went out with a less insolent air than she had worn on entering.

And so the deserted bride was left to bear, as she might, her sorrows.

"Return to Lycurgus! accept aid from Madame D'Eglantine! friendship from my half-sister! a dower forced from Madame D'Eglantine by the machinations of my father! poor, foolish Charlie!—you do not know the one you thus seek to comfort—comfort, by heaping coals of fire on my head and heart! No one understands me!" muttered Florence, and then—whether it was merely from habit, or whether she thus came into closer communion with her best friend, herself—she arose, staggered to one of the tall mirrors and stood looking at her own pale face—into her own great, burning, sleepless eyes.

"No one understands me," she repeated, to those eyes. "I cannot act like others. I cannot be tame, self-repressed, patient, prudent. I must do all, dare all, risk all, feel all, whether I suffer or am happy—live or die. I married Fraser Harold at my own risk. I knew the perils that awaited me—perils of weariness, loathing, desertion—but I loved him and I chose to take the chances. I trusted to my beauty to hold him; the brittle chain of flowers has snapped; and we are parted.

"Am I to sit down in a corner and weep out my days? Not I. It was a mad game, from the first—a mad, reckless game; and it shall be played to the end in the same way it was begun."

A bottle of wine, which she had ordered in anticipation of a visit from her husband, was sitting on a small stand close at hand. She poured a little into the slender glass beside it, and drank it, for a deadly faintness was again coming over her. Then she threw herself into an arm-chair to think. She had not sat there five minutes before she sprung up, went quickly into her bedchamber, from which in a short time she emerged, wearing the Quaker garb in which she had first left home. At his last visit Fraser had forgotten his latch-key, and it was now in her possession. She glanced at the clock—it was nearly eleven. Slipping noiselessly down-stairs, she let herself out at the hall door and walked rapidly on until she reached a car which would take her to the vicinity of Fraser's club-house.

As she drew near the building a party of gentlemen were coming down the steps; the one she looked for was among them, and she withdrew around the corner until they had passed, when she walked softly after them, so near as to overhear their conversation.

"Then it is arranged that we take the seven P. M. lightning express, to-morrow evening?" asked her husband's voice.

"If you can be ready, that will be agreeable to us."

"Oh, I can get ready. If I fall short, in my arrangements, I can complete my outfit in St. Louis. You say we shall be gone two months?"

"At least—perhaps ten weeks. We have a famous guide engaged to meet us at St. Louis. We ought to press on, at once, so as to have the whole of October and November for our sport."

"Well, you may count on me. I shall meet you at the train, to-morrow evening, if I do not see you through the day. I made the most of my purchases to-day; but have still a few things more to look after. Good-night," and the group broke up, going its various ways.

So! he had planned to leave her, even before he came and got up that scene because Charlie was giving her back her ring! He had "made most of his purchases" already! If any one could have seen the little face under the Quaker bonnet then, its expression would have startled him. Such flashing orbs, such vicious little teeth pressed into ruby lips, were seldom seen under the prim shadow of that emblem of peace.

In half an hour Florence Harold was safe in the shelter of her apartments again. The first thing she did when she had thrown off her bonnet and drab shawl, was to take from her dressing bureau the little box in which she kept her money and jewels, and to carefully count her loose cash. Then she walked up and down, up and down, with a velvety tread, like some beautiful panther in its tiresome cage, until she had worn herself so completely out that when she did fling herself on her silken-draped bed, sleep came and gave her rest.

Charlie Ward, meanwhile had gone on his way with mingled feelings of sorrow and joy. Deeply sympathizing with the injured wife; indignant with the rich scoundrel who had sacrificed her to his caprices; sorry that she had so wrecked her bright and promising life, Charlie could not but have, also, a feeling of gladness that he had discovered Florence, and could so telegraph to Mr. Vernon on the morrow. It was his intention to also notify Mr. Goldsborough's agent; so the prospect was most promising that he should, very soon, have tidings of Violet, as Mr. Goldsborough had assured her friends they should have when Florence was found and the sum secured which he had demanded.

How much delight this prospect gave Charlie would hardly be inferred from the patience with which he had worked and waited. But love like his, unselfish, deep and enduring, is the love on which it is safe for a girl to build her enchanted castles of future happiness. The thought that, in a few weeks, Violet would return in her mother's company, and he could show her his hand without the ring, and make to her a full explanation of how he was tricked into wearing it, made his spirits light as thistle-down, despite his sympathy for Florence.

He was back at Madame Florian's at the appointed time. Early as it was, Mrs. Harold was dressed and ready to receive him. She was elegantly attired, in carriage toilet, hat and gloves already donned. She looked a little pale and heavy-eyed, but more beautiful than ever. Charlie mutely wondered, as he feasted his eyes on her, how any man could be indifferent, much less cruel, to this lovely little lady.

"Charlie," she said, as soon as he entered, "you can do nothing for me until I have seen what I can do for myself. I am going—as soon as the carriage arrives for which I have sent—to call on Mr. Harold's family. I know where they reside. I shall tell them I am Fraser's wife. If they receive me kindly and honorably, offer me a home with them, and promise to use their influence to have Fraser do right by me, I shall remain with them until his return from the West. If they do not believe my story, or treat me with indignity, then—I have another plan. Will you excuse me, now, and call again at five o'clock this afternoon?"

"I think you do well to assert yourself to his family," answered Charlie. "They must be made to admit your rights. I was about to propose that you should go to them, first."

The clattering of the carriage on the stones below warned them of its arrival, and he led her down and placed her in it.

"*Au revoir*," she said, with a sudden smile on her pale face.

"Shall I not go with you?" he asked anxiously.

"No, no. I prefer to be alone. Farewell, till five o'clock," and he shut the door, and gave the sign to the driver to proceed.

The day seemed a long one to Charlie Ward; he went to see Mr. Blank, sent off his cable dispatch to Mr. Vernon, following it by a long letter; and still there were hours to dispose of before the time for calling again on Mrs. Harold. He admired the courage which had enabled her to go alone, with only her youth and beauty to support her important claims, to the haughty family of her husband; and he wondered, with vivid interest, what the result of the interview would be.

At five o'clock, to the minute, he was at Madame Florian's door. A servant met him, and in answer to his request, told him that Mrs. Fraser had gone away from the house, two hours previously, with all her baggage.

"But she left a note for you, if you are Mr. Ward."

Charlie took the missive which the servant handed him and went down the steps in a sort of stupor. It was some minutes before he broke the seal, and, standing out on the inhospitable pavement, read this brief note:

"DEAR CHARLIE:—The Harolds treated me as an impostor. There is but one thing for me to do—follow my husband. I can not accept charity from Madame D'Eglantine; but, if it will do Violet any good, you can inclose this note to my father, with the earnest request that he will cease to trouble her, and my assurance, that, being the *happy bride* of a *wealthy gentleman*, I do not need the dower he is so good as to try to secure for me! God bless you, Charlie—you have been a true friend. And may He bless papa, too. Tell him I forgive him, and hope we shall meet in Heaven, if not here. Do not fret about me. I am only going to Fraser."

Your friend

"FLORENCE GOLDSBOROUGH HAROLD."

CHAPTER XIX.

TOO LATE!

MR. REDMOND RHODES—a man eminently cautious, reserved, exclusive and haughty—began to feel that he had made a goose of himself at the very least, as he found himself alone in one of the two gloomy rooms he had been so rash as to take, more out of compassion for the little proprietress than because he any longer expected anything to come of it to the advantage of the unfortunate young lady who had appealed to him for assistance.

He had ordered a fire to be made in the ancient fireplace, and an extra wax taper or two to be placed on the shelf above it; so that he was not as dreary as he might have been; still the old place contrasted unfavorably with the gayly-furnished rooms of the grand hotel where he *should have been*.

"It is not often I get betrayed into an adventure so thoroughly Quixotic as this," he murmured, more than half-vexed, as he sat in a great chair, covered with moldy leather, before the small but cheerful fire. "If I am mistaken in my surmise I shall have made a most egregious fool of myself in telegraphing to Madame D'Eglantine. Why did I not ask the girl's name? Then I should not have been acting on an uncertainty."

"Poor thing! She asked me, in that note, for poison! Would I contrive to get her some? A most piteous appeal! No wonder, after all, that I felt bound to follow and interfere in her behalf."

"What a face is hers!—so pure, so delicate, young and sweet. The most wonderfully lovely, seraphic face I ever saw!—not dark, vivid, glowing, enchanting like hers whom Fraser Harold married only to neglect, I fear—not a face like that, to dazzle and infatuate a man, to wile him out of his cooler judgment and win him on to all sorts of rashness—not a face like little Florence's—but so sweet, *spirituelle*. It would appeal to any man who was truly a man of honor and chivalry. So why should I be ashamed of the impulse which urged me to follow and try to help her? Heaven knows I would tramp the streets of this

city all night if I had the faintest hope of obtaining a clue to her whereabouts."

He stared into the fire, seeing pictured there the appealing eyes which had turned to him that day—seeing the delicately-rounded chin, the rosy, trembling mouth, the peasant's dress, the little feet in the big shoes—thinking of the despairing request of the poor maiden, for poison to put an end to her innocent life, before it should be soiled by contact with that miserable old *roue* into whose arms an unnatural father was forcing her.

"I cannot sleep. I wish I knew *what* to do in her behalf," he muttered, rising to his feet, and walking up and down in front of the hearth in great agitation. If it were my own sister I could hardly feel more concerned."

He pulled out his watch—the hands marked eleven.

At that moment a knock sounded at his door. He hastened to open it. The proprietress stood there, fidgeting, embarrassed.

"There is a lady wishes to see monsieur. I know not if it be proper—" the speaker was thrust aside and the peasant-girl of the boat stood before him, transformed into an elegant young lady, dressed in light silk, but hatless, gloveless, with a traveling-shawl only thrown on over her rich dress—a young lady pale as she would be in her coffin, panting, wild-eyed, but struggling to keep up an appearance of calmness, lest this woman should say, with others, that she was mad.

"Sir!" she cried, addressing Redmond, quickly, "did you do what I asked of you? Have you the poison ready to give me? Ah, if you have it not," shrinking and trembling, "go now, this moment—before it is too late—and bring it to me. You must not refuse me! I got away from them. But they will discover my absence in a few minutes and will overtake me."

"My dear child," answered Redmond, taking her two cold hands, "I dare not do what you ask of me. I should be *particeps criminis* to a murder. Impossible! But I will protect you, with my life if need be."

"You have no power. My own mother could not prevent my father from taking possession of me. How then can *you*? He will be here in a few minutes, and then I have the choice of marriage, in the morning, with that odious baronet, or of a life passed in some mad-house to which my mother will never be able to trace me. Death, surely, were preferable to either of these—why keep it from me? You are cruel—cruel!" and she burst into tears.

"No, I am not cruel. But I am not as excited as you are. Give me your name, address, something of your history; so that I can find your mother. Refuse to marry the baron. Your father will find it impossible to hide you in a mad-house in a country so well-regulated as this. I will put your friends on the track—only give me their names—" he took out his tablets and waited for her to speak.

"My adopted father is Mr. Vernon of Lycurgus, New Hampshire; but he is now somewhere with my mother, who has a divorce from my father and goes by her own family name of D'Eglantine—the two are searching for me, I have no doubt—"

"Nor I!" exclaimed Mr. Rhodes, cheerfully, "they came over, with me, in the Germania, landing three days ago. They are looking for you. I sent a telegram to Baden this evening to Madame D'Eglantine, saying that I believed you to be the daughter of whom she was in search, and to come on as quickly as possible. Still, she may not be in Baden; the message may not reach her. Yet it will comfort you to know that it cannot be many days before she overtakes you; and you have my assurance that you shall be immured in no asylum, or other dark place, without my knowledge. If I cannot prevent your father doing as he pleases I can put detectives on his movements, so that his steps will be all known to your mother. So, now, my dear girl, be of good cheer; defy the hideous old baron; let your father persecute you as he may for it; he will be watched and not allowed to do you serious harm."

All this time the proprietress stood, glaring

uneasily at the couple, unable to understand their language, but certain that something startling was transpiring, and afraid for the reputation of her old tumble-down house. Mr. Rhodes comprehended her trepidation. He realized, too, that this was no place for the young lady to remain over night, should it be that her father failed to look for her.

"Madame," said he to the woman, in French, "have you no quiet, respectable female friend with whom this young lady can take refuge for the night, without being compromised? I will answer for it that you are well paid for your trouble; and your friend, also. Money is no object. Mademoiselle desires to escape a suitor whom her father favors; you saw him—the ugly old baron!"

"Yes," said the proprietress, with a laugh, "'tis no wonder mademoiselle flies from such a lover—ah, bah!" shrugging her shoulders. "I can provide her with lodging where she will be secure—but, monsieur must know it is not my business to get myself into trouble!" with another shrug.

"Tell her my mother will make her rich for life," murmured Violet, hastily, "if she will only promise—Oh, what is that?" and she began to scream and to run to the further end of the room.

Up the dim staircase, with a great flaring of lights, came the father, the ancient lover and two *gens d'armes*—enough, in all conscience, to secure one poor, trembling girl. The flame of the candles they bore flashed out over the weapons of the tall police-soldiers—over the suave, malicious smile on the parent's face, and the anxious little grin and frown on that of the old milord, whose whole wicked soul was stirred by the fear of losing a young, beautiful wife whose estates stretched far and broad under the sunny skies of France.

"This is the abductor of my daughter—arrest him," commanded Ethan Goldsborough in his broken German, pointing to Mr. Rhodes and the *gens-d'armes* immediately laid a strong clasp on both of Redmond's arms.

In vain the prisoner expostulated and explained; the fellows had their orders from the chief, and dare not disobey them. A stranger, like Redmond, was at a terrible disadvantage with an enemy like Sir Israel, who had lived years in the country, who was known everywhere as a rich milord, and was familiar with all the processes of the law. He had managed the affair, and stood by, grinning like the ancient Lucifer he was, while Mr. Rhodes strove to convince the men that they were all wrong—would be punished—that the consul of the port should know, ay, the United State minister. These soldiers were but machines who did the bidding of others; they shook their heads gravely, said nothing, pulled and pushed their prisoner along; while the proprietress, all her sympathies reversed by the sight of the *gens-d'armes*, wrung her hands, volubly urging her lodger to go peaceably, and not ruin a poor widow by quarreling in her house with the soldiers.

And so our fastidious Redmond Rhodes, who avoided everything sensational as he would avoid the small-pox, passed the remainder of the night in a dreary room of the city-prison.

He was angry and mortified.

"This pays me for meddling in other people's affairs!"

But his feeling of humiliation for himself was nothing compared with the anxiety, the positive wretchedness he felt in being hindered from doing anything for Miss D'Eglantine. Every moment of the night he saw the look of terror in her eyes when he was dragged away. He counted the hours, the minutes, until his miserable breakfast was brought to him. He had an appeal ready—scrawled on an old letter—to the United States consul, asking him to come *immediately* and interfere in his behalf; and this he gave to the attendant who brought his meal, accompanied by a gold piece which made the fellow's eyes glisten, and an order to have the message sent without delay.

He expected a visit from the consul within an hour—or two, at the furthest—for the references he had given as to his position at home

were such as that personage would not be apt to slight; but the whole morning crawled on at a snail's pace; noon came, with its dinner of bread and cabbage soup; but no consul. The jailer swore that the letter had been delivered; that the consul had promised to come immediately; that he had no idea why he had not kept his promise. The *truth* was that bribery had been at work outside, and the energetic appeal of the prisoner still reposed in the jailer's pocket.

"When shall I have my call to appear before the court, then?"

"Some time to-day; it cannot be long now."

The whole day passed, darkness fell, and the prisoner had not been summoned before the civil authorities. Cool and well-governed as was the temper of Mr. Rhodes, he was in a fever of anger and despair by bedtime—anger for himself, despair for the lovely girl whom he had failed to help. How powerless *she* must be to resist the will of those two men, since *he* had so easily been trapped! His tortured imagination pictured her in two scenes, constantly—in one, she was the doomed bride of the grinning baronet—in the other, a corpse, slain by her own hand to escape that doom. The thought of Madame D'Eglantine added to his uneasiness.

And so the second sleepless night wore itself slowly away.

About ten o'clock of the second day his prison door opened, the *gens-d'arme* waited to conduct him before the magistrate, where, as the complainants did not appear, there was no case against him, and he was soon dismissed. Mr. Rhodes knew his accusers would fail to appear; doubtless they were many miles from there before this—and their unhappy victim with them; as soon as he was free, he hurried to the consul's office to demand, indignantly, the reason for his letter having been neglected. He had just learned that it had never been received, when a lady walked into the office, and throwing her veil from her face, revealed the delicate, high-bred features of Madame D'Eglantine.

When she saw Mr. Rhodes she uttered a half-suppressed cry, rushed to him and wrung his hand.

"Where is Violet—where is my child?" she eagerly demanded.

"Alas! I would that I could inform you, Madame D'Eglantine! I am horribly afraid those villains have succeeded in making you and your daughter miserable for life. You must hear this lady's story, and give us what aid you can," continued Redmond, turning to the consul, who very willingly listened to what they had to say, promising all the assistance in his power; but very dubious as to his power to afford any under the circumstances.

While the three were anxiously consulting together, a messenger came into the room, inquired for Monsieur Rhodes, and handed him a sealed envelope.

Redmond hastily tore it open; a slip of paper fell out. He picked it up, and read, written in a cramped, trembling hand, which he took to be that of the baronet's:

"If Monsieur Rhodes wishes to ease his mind let him consult the register in the church of St. Joseph's."

"They are married! That is what he means!" shrieked the unhappy mother. "Where is this church? Let us fly to it at once and put an end to this terrible suspense."

"Perhaps she is dead!" thought Redmond, but did not say it.

The consul hunted in the directory for the address of the church, while Mr. Rhodes called a carriage.

In five minutes he, with Madame D'Eglantine, pale as a corpse, silent as a corpse, beside him, was being driven rapidly in the direction of St. Joseph's.

It was a Protestant church; but the sexton was in the vestibule.

"Was there a marriage—or a funeral—in this church yesterday?" hastily inquired Redmond.

"There were two marriages and three funerals," answered the man, looking at him as if he doubted his sanity.

"May we look at the records?" was the next

question, accompanied by a thrust into the sexton's hand of that key which unlocks most doors—the key of gold.

"Follow me," said the man, leading the way through the solemn aisles of the dim cathedral, and on into a small room to the right of the grand altar, where he opened a large book which lay on a high desk, and pointed to the last page of writing.

Redmond made way for the lady he conducted, who bent a moment, with white cheeks and strained eyes over the volume, then pointed with her finger, looked up into the kind face bending above her, with a glance of hopeless, dim misery, tried to murmur the words which her lips refused to form, and slid down to his feet, fainting under the shock.

He raised her on his arm, and looked at the page, where she had pointed—there was the register of the marriage of Violet Goldsborough, daughter of Ethan Goldsborough, of the United States, to Sir Israel Benjamin, baronet, of England. The signatures were appended—were authentic, beyond a doubt; he recognized both the cramped hand of the baronet, and the delicate, tremulous chirography of the girl who had written him the note on board the steamer.

CHAPTER XX.

"LIFE, LIVED AND OVER, IN HALF A YEAR."

"By Narcissus, Apollo, and all the other lovely youths of fable, that's a gloriously handsome boy who has attached himself to your service, Harold!" exclaimed one of the Englishmen of Fraser Harold's company, as they one day jogged along, under the red November sun of the misty and amethystine Indian summer, over an endless prairie, covered with the short, coarse buffalo-grass which gave food to the huge creatures of whom they were in pursuit. "A gloriously handsome boy! He reminds me of the pages who followed the knights in the old, romantic days of chivalry."

"Yes," answered Fraser, throwing a backward glance at the lad who rode behind him on a stout little mustang, whose proportions seemed in keeping with his small, slender rider, "he is an uncommonly pretty little chap. Not of much use, however. He begged so hard to be allowed to accompany us that I did not think it worth while to deny him. How such a flower of a boy happened to grow up in Kansas is a mystery. I did not believe he could keep up with us, riding all day as we do. I hope to take him safe back to his mother in Leavenworth."

"Melted diamonds could be no brighter than his eyes! Wouldn't he be a heart-smasher among your Eastern girls?"

"His eyes remind me of my—of a young lady's in whom I was interested not long ago," said Fraser, and then he added: "Heigho!" and looked sentimental for a full minute.

"Perhaps that is the reason of your allowing him to follow you."

"Perhaps—yet, hardly. That little affair with the lady is off, you know; and once we let them go the more completely the better."

"Aw, certainly," responded the English swell; "it is cruel kindness to keep them dangling, you know—better cut the golden cord at one fell stroke. I've served too many that way," and he stroked his mutton-chops with one hand, the other being engaged with the rein.

Every word of this edifying conversation fell on the acute ears of the boy who rode a few paces behind. The speakers would have been astonished had they observed how it affected him.

At first a deep flush had mounted into his swarthy cheeks; this was followed by a livid paleness as Harold spoke lightly of the "affair being off;" a glow, like that of a dagger in the sun, leaped into his black eyes at the remaining sentences.

He was, indeed, a handsome boy, looking about fifteen, but small for his age—slight, graceful; with crisp little black curls all over his head, small features, fine, dark, expressive eyes, and a smooth skin almost as copper-colored as an Indian's.

He had silver spurs on his boots, wore blue leggings, fringed and embroidered; a blue wam-

mus bound about the waist with a long military sash wound two or three times around; and a hat with a broad band about it, and a wide, slouching brim to keep off sun and rain. There was a knife in his belt, but no pistols; nor did he carry the rifle like every other member of the party.

He had avowed his ignorance of the plains and of hunting when asking to be taken along; declaring that he had a passion for a wild life, and wanted to take his first lesson.

"It'll be as good as an eddication to go 'long with you fellows, when you've got such a man at yer head"—for the party had secured, as guide and leader, one of the hero-hunters of the plains. "I'll pay fur my own fodder, an' help cook yours besides;" and so far, Floss—that was the lad's name—had kept his part of the bargain; he was always ready to hold a horse for Mr. Harold, black his boots, wash his dishes, make his bed, pack his traps, although he asked no pay for such services.

The hired guides and servants found that he surpassed them all in making coffee or broiling a buffalo steak. Everybody liked him, despite a certain reserve and sadness not apt to be appreciated by the rough hunters who accompanied the amateurs.

With that dagger-gleam still darting from his bright eyes, Floss touched a silver spur to the tough side of his shaggy mustang, and the horse bounded forward, the boy touching his slouched hat respectfully as he passed the gentlemen, and pressing on until he had overtaken the leader, who was riding two or three hundred yards in advance.

"Hullo, my little chap!" said the hunter, looking kindly at the boy as he rode up. "Want anything?"

"Yes," said the boy, his large eyes glowing like fire under his hat-brim; "I want to know, Bill, if there's going to be any real danger during this excursion?"

"Why?"

"'Coz if there is, I want to be in the thick of it."

"Oh, you do! What fur, I wonder?"

"'Coz I'm tired of life, Bill. I jined in hopes that suthin' would take me off," and here the fire was quenched in sudden tears which rolled over onto the swarthy cheeks.

"Sho! jist you h'ist that, my boy—'twon't do," and the brave hunter, who had killed his forty men, to say nothing of red-skins! reached out a slender, supple hand, not much larger than a lady's, and laid it gently on Floss' shoulder. "But, as to the danger you ask about—hum! that moughtn't be so fur away. The tracks o' them pesky red-skins is about as thick, this morning, as the houses o' them prairie-dogs. They're over thar, somewhar, waitin' fer us," and he pointed toward a range of low hills, lying against the horizon, and shrouded in a purple haze, so that one who did not know could not tell whether they were ten or fifty miles away. "I reckon I ought to tell my friends, an' give 'em their choice 'twixt losing the bison altogether or having a bout with them red devils."

"Indeed, they should be told at once," said Floss, decidedly.

And then he fell to thinking. It would not be a pleasant death to be scalped or tortured by Indians—the bare idea made his very soul shrink with terror—yet he wanted to die. Ay! he even fancied that he wanted some others of that gay company to die, too—say the two gallant gentlemen who had avowed the sentiment that when they were "off" with a love-affair, the more completely they were off the better! At times he thought he could himself murder that Mr. Harold, who carried himself so finely and so jovially, from day to day. Then again, his heart turned traitor to his purpose. Floss rode on, with drooping head, thinking very fast and hard indeed, for a few minutes. Whether or not he wished to die, or desired the death of others, the issue was not, at present, in his own hands.

The guide had stopped his horse, waiting until the whole company, of fifteen gentlemen; three other guides and helpers, and the boy, made a group about him. He then disclosed the fact that Indians were lurking in the vicin-

ity, and asked the question whether the hunt was to be abandoned or whether they were to proceed.

The retreat could doubtless be safely made, for nearly the whole day was before them, and an attack would hardly be made on the open plain in broad daylight. The blood of the descendants of the heroes of ancient chivalry was up, and they positively refused to ride back without a shot either at the game they came to seek or the foe who hindered their pursuit of it. The cheek of many an English beauty would have paled, that day, could she have heard, from afar, the discussion held on that sea-like plain and the resolution which ended it.

It was decided to advance; for if there were tracks of Indians, there were tracks of bison, too. The Indians *might* be only peaceable hunters like themselves; though their leader scouted this theory. By a craft learned only by long experience he made himself certain that the party was at least double their own number—that they were warring red-skins—and their object murder and pillage.

The little party of eighteen hunters and one boy rode on, under the mild, hazy sunlight, keeping well together, their weapons in faultless order, their keen eyes glancing about them, and their spirits more exuberant than ever from that consciousness of possible danger which excites just enough to exhilarate. Floss fell back to his place behind Fraser Harold. His black eyes no longer glinted like daggers, but were filled with a yearning, troubled expression which would have puzzled the gay cavalier had he unwittingly surprised it.

Not an hour had passed when leisurely mounting a slight, billowy incline they saw before them a small herd of bison, leisurely grazing.

The temptation was irresistible.

The hunters were to the windward. They widened their belt and advanced with all possible caution in a half-circle, coming within almost shooting distance before the leader of the herd perceived his danger and gave the alarm. The instant that the troop signaled danger, and broke, bellowing, into their lumbering gallop which made the earth tremble and shake, the hunters dug their spurs into their animals' sides and dashed after them, swinging their rifles into range as they galloped. Their guide would not fire a shot. If the game was to be killed the amateurs should have all the glory.

In another half-hour three slain buffaloes cumbered the plain; the rest of the herd had disappeared in the purple mist of the Indian-summer day, which was now gone past high noon; the successful hunters, in good spirits and with fearful appetites, gathered about the youngest of the three slain monsters from whose carcass one of the guides was cutting tempting steaks which another thrust on to pointed sticks and tossed over the coals of a fire kindled from the ruins of a cottonwood. The aroma of coffee mingled with the odor of trampled grass and the pungent fragrance of wood-smoke. The tired horses were plunging their noses into the coarse but green grass which showed a little brighter along the edge of a brackish stream. The chief guide threw himself down on the highest point of land, keeping a sharp look-out that never entirely relaxed its vigilance, he having seen to it, at first, before anything was done toward dinner, that the rifles were all reloaded, and that each man held his weapons close at hand.

"I don't like this smoky weather," grumbled the chief; "a red-skin can creep within a hundred yards and we not see him. A hull cloud of 'em mought be hanging over thar, an' we none the wiser."

He kept his uneasiness, however, pretty well to himself, and the half-famished hunters made a jolly meal. Floss ate his bit of meat, his cracker, and drank his tin cup of coffee in silence, near his master. He had two ship's biscuits handed to him, which he did not need just then, and so thrust them into the pocket of his wammus; for he knew, by experience, that it might be late before they found a suitable place to sup.

He rode very close to Fraser Harold that afternoon. Ever and anon he cast apprehensive

glances toward the long, low range of hills which seemed as far away as ever. He had wanted to die, and he had desired the death of his master—but, ah, not *that way*—by those hands!—and he shuddered.

The sun lay low on the bosom of the west like a copper shield—the hills were entirely hidden from view by a purple curtain; the gallant hunters had begun to cast longing eyes about for some sign of a stream beside which to encamp.

"Boys!" suddenly yelled Bill, the leader, 'try fer yonder gully—it will partially shelter us—the red-skins are swooping down on us, not a hundred rods away."

In fifteen minutes the whole brief, thrilling episode was over—the young English snobs had been in a genuine skirmish with the Indians—an experience as novel as it was undesirable. Not one had showed the white feather.

Their New York friends—the dandies of the clubs—had borne themselves with equal courage. Oh, that the delicate-faced beauties peeping from behind the lace and silk of Fifth Avenue windows at certain elegant dawdlers sauntering by could have seen those same lispng dandies behind cover of the gully, taking aim at the yelling savages with the same coolness that they took aim at a new singer with their opera-glasses—their teeth a little set, their cheeks a little pale, but their eyes flashing dauntless fire, their fingers steady on the trigger.

That providential gully alone saved them from destruction. This gave them an advantage so great that the attacking party, four times their number, soon drew off, taking with them fifteen dead comrades. Of our gallant band "not one was injured," thought Bill, looking about him in triumph.

He was mistaken.

A moment after he had made his count some one reeled on his horse and fell to the ground.

It was Fraser Harold.

A cry of dismay went up from his friends, mingled with the wild, ringing, frantic shriek of the boy, who flung himself from his mustang, darted to the side of the fallen man, cast himself down and raised the drooping head—the beautiful, proud head, now falling from side to side like some broken flower—on his knee.

"Fraser! Fraser! oh, God! he is dying. Fraser!"

At the sound of his name called in that piercing, passionate, agonized voice, the wounded man opened his darkening eyes.

"Fraser, I am here. It is your little girl—your poor little girl. Do not die—look at me—speak to me—my darling!"

"Florence, is this you?" the words came with difficulty.

"Yes, yes. Do not be angry with me, my husband. Did you think I could keep away from you? let you go off, here, into danger—Ah, heaven! he will die, in spite of all. Help! can none of you help him?" she piteously asked, turning her great dark eyes, full of misery, upon those who stood about, listening in wonder and agitation to the words of the two.

"Stand aside; let me see the wound," spoke the authoritative voice of the guide, kneeling on the ground beside the dying man and beginning to tear away the clothing from over his breast.

Harold feebly shook his head and made a motion with his hand to indicate the flask in the hunter's belt.

Bill understood, and poured a few drops of brandy between the whitening lips. All of a sudden Harold raised himself to a sitting posture, speaking quite distinctly:

"Good-by, friends. I have just a word to say. This lady is my wife. She is entitled to your consideration. Tell my parents to—take care—of her. I leave her all my effects—tell them so. My dear wife, I am sorry for you. Dying is not very hard"—he sunk back into Florence's arms, turned his glazing eyes upward to the broad heavens and expired, with a faint struggle; no more than the shivering of a leaf in the wind, and a human life was at an end.

Poor, poor, passionate, vain, undisciplined little Florence!

Six months before she had dreamed her idle, girlish dreams of life, as she hung over the rustic bridge of her native village.

Here she sat now, far, far from home or friends or any familiar thing, in the midst of a band of strange men—a widow.

Life, lived and over, in half a year!

Oh, the red rose she had placed, with trembling hand, on the window-sill! Oh, the summer moonlight among the trees of the park—the voice that whispered—the lips that kissed! Oh, the bliss of wifehood, too brief, too mingled with shame, suspense and anguish. Oh, the whispers of vanity, telling her she was fair—the stings of desertion hissing that her power was over! And now—*this* was the end of all—this dead face smiling on her knee, and she—a widow.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MEETING UNDER RAINY SKIES.

CHARLIE WARD passed several tiresome, dull, unhappy days after the flight of Florence. He had nothing to do but wait—the hardest of all work. He felt uneasy about Florence and restless to hear from Violet. Every pulse of his heart tingled with impatience to once more see, or hear a word from the fair girl to whom he had given his affections. In his worst imaginings of the persecutions to which Ethan Goldsborough might subject her, he had never conceived of anything half so bad as the reality. But he knew that she must be lonely and ill at ease torn from those she loved, and he longed to hear from her. His joy was great, then, when, a week after his own dispatches had been sent, he received a brief message: "Come over, if possible, by first steamer. Will meet you in Paris," and signed by his tutor, Mr. Vernon.

The dispatch reached him on Friday; the following day he sailed on a French steamer for Havre. During the voyage, which was rapid and prosperous, his moods were about equally divided between exaltation and despondency. He might have been sent for because of misfortunes—he might have been sent for to share in their good fortune. Thus the scale ran up and down, while the days passed, until that memorable one on which he presented himself at the landing-office in Paris most frequented by Americans, and was just inquiring for the address of his friends, when Mr. Vernon came up to him and silently seized and pressed his hand.

Mr. Vernon, pale, worn, with an expression of the deepest dejection—the very sight of whose smileless face made Charlie's bounding heart quiver and stand still with a sudden, sharp certainty that something horrible had come to pass.

"What is it?" he asked, turning white, poor boy!

"Come out on the street. Let us find a bench in this garden. I cannot tell you in the presence of others."

Charlie followed silently by his side; his tongue was tied by a dreadful suspense—for the world, he could not have asked another question. They sat down on a rustic seat under a tree, with joyful children and coquettish *bonnes* only in their vicinity; the lawyer took the young man's hand again in his own, and bursting into tears, sobbed out:

"Our darling girl is dead, Charles. She had nothing but trouble over there, and she killed herself."

"Killed herself!" mechanically.

"Yes. Her unnatural father took delight in making her miserable. Finally, to spite her, her mother, all of us, he forced her into a marriage with an old Jew baronet—the most detestable creature that ever coveted a pure young girl for his wife—she could not escape the two—"

"Oh," moaned Charlie, "you are killing me, too, Mr. Vernon, with this story. Oh, I cannot bear it."

"Man, that is born of woman, is prone to trouble as the sparks are to fly upward," continued Mr. Vernon. "Try to be a man, Charles, my dear boy. Her mother has had to endure it—and I. They dragged her to the al-

tar, in a strange city, and forced her to sign the marriage register; then hurried her on board the Dover steamer, to take her to England, where the old baronet proposed passing the honeymoon. Knowing her to be desperate, and apprehensive that she might attempt to destroy herself, they would not leave her alone an instant. They had taken the evening boat, the day of the marriage, and about nine o'clock, as they sat, at her request, on deck, she, appearing very resigned and docile, with a lightning movement, leaped over the guards into the turbid waters of the Channel."

Charlie moaned and hid his face in his hands. It was several minutes before Mr. Vernon could proceed.

"They stopped the steamer and sent out all the boats at command; but the night was dark, the sea rough—they did not find her."

"Charlie," asked his companion, after a time, "would it be any comfort to you to hear that the bad man who had leagued with her father against our poor Violet was drowned in the effort to rescue her?"

"Oh, I don't know," was the shuddering reply. "I have no right to feel in that way."

"True: 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' We dare not, be glad of his punishment; but he *was* punished—fearfully! He insisted on getting into one of the boats, with three sailors, capsized it by his awkwardness, was carried under the ship, and could not be found. Their comrades had a time to save the sailors, as it was."

"How is Madame D'Eglantine?" Charlie inquired, after another long pause.

"She is ill in bed; but she will not refuse to see you, my boy."

They arose and walked slowly out into the gay boulevard. The sun still shone, the children still laughed and romped, the bright leaves fluttered down from the trees, the sky was blue, the world moved on—but to Charles Ward night was over everything. The passing of the crowd was but a funeral march; he walked on beside his friend, dreading, caring for nothing.

The meeting between him and Madame D'Eglantine was mournful.

"Ah!" she sighed, pressing his hand, "how gladly would I give my girl to you, were she here now. Once I thought her too fair, too good, for any one short of a fairy prince. How happy would I be, to see her sitting by you now, your promised wife."

It was more than a day before Charlie could bear to ask all the particulars of their loss, or to hear them. Gradually he learned, in addition to the main fact, that they had first received the tidings from Mr. Goldsborough himself, who had sent a telegram from Dover to Madame D'Eglantine, whom he knew to be in the port they had left, in close pursuit of them. He had followed the telegram by a printed account of the disaster; and she had also had a long letter from him, giving particulars, and asking about Florence.

"Where is he?" asked Charlie.

"We believe him to be in London."

"I am going to try and find him, and have a personal interview. I must tell him all I know about Florence, and garner every scrap of information about this—this accident."

"I wish you would, Mr. Ward," sighed Madame D'Eglantine; and Charlie left, that night, for London.

"What a comfort—what a help—such a son would be!" exclaimed the bereaved mother with a fresh burst of tears, after he left her.

Charlie arrived in London on a wet, dark, dismal December afternoon. The lamps were lighted at three o'clock, and burned dimly in the thick atmosphere. Where to go—what to do—he had not decided. He only felt pushed on by the hand of an irresistible fate to find Ethan Goldsborough. The only thing which presented itself to his mind to do was to consult the registers of the leading hotels, and to visit the American banking and exchange office. As he stumbled out of the railway carriage onto the platform, in the mist and drizzle, and stood an instant debating what hotel he should try his chances with, a tall, broad-shouldered, portly, handsome American gentleman of mid-

the age walked quickly past him, with a lady on his arm.

If Charlie had inadvertently come in contact with an electric battery he could scarcely have been more shocked.

"Ethan Goldsborough!" he cried, but not in an audible voice, for he had no wish to alarm that person, before he could speak to him.

Who was that with him?

Despite of the waterproof cloak veiling the tall, slight figure, there was something about it familiar to Charlie. His heart leaped into his throat. He could have sworn, afterward, that the clouds parted, suddenly flooding the December world with June sunshine; though no such phenomenon occurred. He did not pause to think, to hope, to fear—to observe propriety—to avoid a scene—to do anything wise, cautious, safe. He just sprung forward after the hurrying pair, came up with them on the lady's side, reached out a quivering hand, and tore the thick veil from the features it muffled.

"How dare you, ruffian?"

"Oh, I dare anything, Ethan Goldsborough! How dare you?"

For Violet, with a scream of joy, had flung herself upon her lover's breast, and was clinging to him in the very street.

"Ay, how dare you lie to us, by telling us she was dead?"

Mr. Goldsborough replied to this passionate question of Charlie's with a diabolical smile, which revealed his malicious intent more fully than words could have done; though he added, presently:

"It was always a pleasure to me to do anything for her mother's happiness."

"Heartless scoundrel! But tell me, Violet, were you really married?"

"Yes," she answered, blushing, and turning half away from him.

"You may like to draw a crowd—I do not," interposed the father. "I propose to escape into a carriage. Come, Violet."

He hailed a coachman and the three entered the close carriage; for Violet had clung to Charlie's hand, and nothing less than death could have made him lose sight of her.

"Did he tell mamma I was dead?" the girl asked, as the vehicle rattled on over the muddy stones.

"Yes—you, and—and—the other one: the man you married."

"Sir Israel Benjamin is dead," spoke Violet, solemnly.

"Thank God, Violet. I cannot be sorry to hear it."

"No, Charlie, he deserved it—yet it was terrible! And he died in the attempt to rescue me."

"Then you did throw yourself overboard from the steamer?"

"Yes—to escape Sir Israel. He came after me. The men picked me up, as by a miracle. It was thought I was dead for more than an hour; but a physician finally revived me. I was saved—and he—was swept under the vessel."

She shuddered, and grew silent. Charlie could see, even in that faint light, how wan, how almost ghastly, the sweet face had grown. Her father smiled grimly, as he sat by her side. To the young man he appeared like an inquisitor, torturing his victim to death, by slow degrees, and enjoying the process. His heart almost burst with indignation; he could hardly refrain from laying his hands on the large white throat of the man and squeezing some of the badness out of him.

The carriage drew up before a fine hotel.

"Do you propose to inflict your company upon us?" asked Mr. Goldsborough, insolently.

"Yes, sir, for a little while. I talked with your daughter Florence less than three weeks ago. She is a wife, now; and sent a message to you."

The smooth face of the scoundrel changed. He loved his daughter—there was no mistake about that!

"Married! my little girl a wife?" he said, huskily. "Come up to our parlor, Mr. Ward, and tell me about it."

Charlie entered the hotel with them, accompanying them to their private parlor on an up-

per floor. Mr. Goldsborough ordered dinner to be served in the room, immediately; and, while the meal progressed, listened to what his guest had to tell him about his child. Charlie saw fit to tell only the favorable part of the story.

"Demme, I might have known her bright eyes would catch her a rich husband in no time," commented the father, drinking glass after glass of champagne. Finally, coffee was placed, at the host's request, on the table; the elder man turned and stooped to pick up his napkin—the waiter had been dismissed with the appearance of the coffee—and Charlie seized the opportunity to drop a powder into his cup, which he had for some time been holding ready, in the hollow of his hand.

It was not half an hour after this before the wine, and the powerful but not dangerous opiate thus deftly administered, closed the eyes of the scheming banker in a profound sleep.

"Come, Violet, this is our opportunity. Your mother is in Paris. I will take you directly to her. We can gain the night train to Dover, if we leave here immediately. Will you trust yourself to me?"

"Will I trust an angel of light, Charlie, to save me from a demon?"

Burdened with very little baggage, light of heart, bright of countenance, with a delicious consciousness of coming bliss for which they were quite willing to bide a proper time,

"These lovers fled away into the storm," leaving the wicked father to labor with his opium-dreams.

"I was given that powder for the toothache, months ago," explained Charlie, laughing, when the train was once in motion and the young pair felt comparatively safe. "I would not take it, but placed it carefully in my wallet for future emergencies—and lo! 'there is a time for everything under the sun.'"

A railway train is swift, but a telegraphic message is more swift, and twenty minutes before the London night express arrived at its station in Dover, the chief of police at that point had received an order by the wires, reading thus: "Arrest a young couple, eloping, the lady about seventeen, fair complexion, blue eyes, an American; the young gentleman, brown eyes, hair ditto and curling, an American, name Ward. Detain the lady at least, on order of her father, who will go on for her by next train; she is not of age, consequently subject to his control. The young man can be allowed to proceed;" and signed by the head of the London detective force.

Ethan Goldsborough had aroused from his untimely slumbers in season to strike his venomous fangs once more, with a last desperate effort, into his innocent victims.

CHAPTER XXII.

EXEUNT OMNES.

An old chateau by the sea.

It is one of those sunny, slumbrous days that love to brood over France in summer—a day that would be oppressive in its languorous heat in some vicinities; yet here, by the sea, the air is as crisp as it is blue and bright.

A delightful, romantic, magnificent old place!

The chateau is large, rambling, picturesque, bearing traces of having been erected during the splendors of the reign of Louis XIV., with many modern additions.

The red-tiled roofs, quaint towers and chimneys, and quainter windows perched in every imaginable spot, appear as solid as they are venerable—the whole tone of the gray and dark-red mass of buildings, standing on their green terraces, is warm and pleasant to the eye. There is a lovely flower-garden—a little too artificial, perhaps, after the French style, but still very lovely, on the south side; lawns, groves of limes, mulberry and orange to the north; vineyards and sunny fields teeming with grain stretching away on all sides, but the west—there the glittering, softly-rolling, deep-blue sea.

Onto the stone terrace that overlooks the ocean—the long, gray terrace with its heavy, carved balustrade, against which shines the dark-green of creeping myrtle and the wind-

wan cheeks of a few straggling roses—as the sun melts rosily into the far waters and the light breeze rushes in from the gold-tipped waves with a gayer freedom—comes a lady, and walks slowly up and down, looking wistfully—with great, solemn, luminous, beautiful eyes—over the sliding, shimmering seas.

She is a little lady, dressed in black, without an ornament about her except the large gold cross which gleams on her bosom. Her slender, almost childlike figure, gains a womanly dignity from the length of her sweeping train and the grace and ease of her movements. Her hair and eyes seem to have gone into mourning, with her dress, they are so purple black and the eyes so sad and wistful. But youth has refused to join in the sacrifice, and hung his crimson banner on the dark cheeks and love-curved lips.

Youth and health have conspired against grief; so, that if the lovely eyes are soft with a vague melancholy, the red blood kindles in the vivid face and on the little scarlet mouth.

There is to be a wedding in the old chateau on the morrow.

It is full of retainers, going busily about, arranging garlands and vases of flowers, hundreds of wax tapers; and cakes, confections and viands of the most superb quality and variety.

Every one of the hundred paneled, gilded, carved rooms wears a festal aspect. In the grand dining-hall the table is laid for dinner for but a few persons this evening; but a band of musicians from the city wait in the great window to discourse enchanting melodies during the repast.

In the window of an upper room a gold-haired girl of nineteen—tall, elegant, of the most refined and *spirituelle* beauty—dressed in soft robes of flowing white, with rosebuds in her hair and bosom—stands and watches with blushing eagerness the white line of dusty road that winds among the fields and vineyards—watches the approach of the carriage-and-four which she already sees thundering along at breakneck speed in the distance.

Now the carriage whirls nearer and enters the chateau gates, a quarter of a mile away. She leans from the open window; at a break in the avenue of trees she sees a handkerchief waving as the vehicle comes nigh, and she kisses her dainty finger-tips, and then suddenly darts back from the window, blushing furiously, and pressing her hand to her heart to still its throbs of shame, joy, happy love.

In a few minutes more a servant knocks at the chamber-door and tells the panting beauty what she already knows—that her young monsieur has arrived. She goes out, tardily; slips slowly, with lingering steps, down the broad staircase, and enters the immense drawing-room to the left. Here a happy-looking, handsome young fellow, who has been gnawing his lips with impatience, darts forward and catches the sweet, palpitating ghost to his breast.

"Violet!"

"Charlie!"

A young couple who are expecting to be married in the morning do not care for inquisitive reporters at their meeting; so we will cross the great hall to a smaller room—a sort of ladies' boudoir, on the other side—where the host and hostess of the chateau are welcoming an unexpected guest.

"Mr. Rhodes, we are perfectly delighted! Your presence gives the last pleasure we could have craved. How good it was of you to come all the way from New York with our dear boy, to keep him company and be present at his wedding!"

"Ah, Mrs. Vernon, I must hasten to own that I am not so unselfish as I appear. I had an object—an object of the greatest possible importance to me!—in coming here with Charlie."

Murder will out. Redmond Rhodes has called our old friend, Madame D'Eglantine, Mrs. Vernon, and that is who she is and has been for the last six months. It is Violet's adopted father—at last with the right to be called her father—who stands beside the fair owner of the old chateau, her contented husband.

Two years have passed since the foggy night

in England when the detective waited to arrest our lovers ere they should flee across the Channel. Ethan Goldsborough had a double object in bringing his daughter back to London—first, to further torment her long-suffering mother; and second, and most important, to bring forward her claims against the great estates of Sir Israel Benjamin, deceased. As the lawful wife of the baronet, her share of his possessions would be large; she, not being of age, would be controlled by her father, and he would reap a rich harvest out of his devilish plotting and scheming, which had resulted in the baronet's death. Violet was dragged back to London and restored to Mr. Goldsborough by the officers. Charlie went on to Paris with his wonderful good news, which was, with due caution, imparted to Madame D'Eglantine, and had the magic effect to restore her to health—for "joy seldom kills."

Violet persistently, obstinately refused to have or touch a pound or a penny of Sir Israel's money. Her father, finding that the baronet's relatives were determined to make a desperate fight—to ferret out all the circumstances of the marriage, and even to accuse him of foul play—threatening to make him prove before an English jury that he did not connive at Sir Israel's death—concluded that it would be wiser to compromise with them.

They, on their part, were glad to have the wife and her father sign off from all future claim, for the sum of ten thousand pounds. With this in his pocket, Ethan Goldsborough sent Violet back to her mother, with an insulting message, and the declaration—which they were only too happy to hear—that "he washed his hands of them forever."

The desperate man made no attempt to return to America to look after his daughter Florence. Perhaps he intended it—for he still loved her with a passionate, blind, animal fidelity—but he attempted to reach the United States by way of the gambling-hells of the Continent.

"Demme, I'll double my snug little fortune, for Florence's sake!" he resolved—and attempted zealously to do it.

In other words, he became a confirmed gambler—losing and gaining—losing and gaining—but always averaging more loss than gain; and unable to tear himself away from the perilous fascination; until, not more than a twelvemonth from the time of his return to the various Spas where he could indulge his passion—play being then forbidden in Baden-Baden, where he began it—he found himself penniless, friendless, stricken with disease of mind and body, gnawed by memory, deserted by hope—and blew out his brains in the presence of the stolid croupier who had raked in his last kreutzer.

Long before this catastrophe, Madame D'Eglantine had gone to America, at Violet's earnest request, to look after Florence; for Charlie had confided to them her poor prospects of happiness with the man of pleasure she had so rashly married.

Mr. Rhodes chanced again to be their *compagnon du voyage* on the way to New York.

The reader may infer how it still further increased the warmth of their friendship to find that he had befriended Florence, as well as spent two nights in prison on Violet's account. His discovery that the beautiful, imprudent girl he had sheltered and protected was the very one whom they were in search of, came about very simply when they were all talking together. Of course, he gave them Fraser Harold's address—or that of his family—and to their house Violet and her mother went at once, after resting one night from the fatigues of the voyage.

They found the family in deep mourning—heard, with a fresh shock, the news of Fraser's death and the manner of it; scarcely recognizing, at first glance, the pale, quiet, broken-hearted little lady, in widow's weeds, as Florence.

"Oh, take me with you, Madame D'Eglantine," she pleaded, her pride all broken down, "Mr. Vernon and Violet, Charlie and even you, seem so much nearer to me than these do. They are kind, but they are cold as icicles; I know from their manner they feel that I am in some way to blame for their son's death. I used to be jealous of you, Violet," she added, looking piteously at her fair half-sister, "I was hateful to you, willful, vain, spoiled. Now I am only a poor, broken-hearted woman, whose faults, I hope, are buried in her husband's grave," and the tears stole down her wan cheeks.

"You are my sister, by blood and by affection," answered Violet, weeping with her. "We will love you and cherish you, as never

sister was loved and cared for. Mamma, shall not Florence go home with us—be your child as much as I am?"

"Yes," said Madame D'Eglantine—and so it was.

They passed the remainder of the winter in New York, having delightful apartments, their business cared for by Mr. Vernon, and Charlie being scarcely a more constant visitor than Redmond Rhodes.

In June they went to France to remain, Madame's vast estates there requiring her and her agent's personal supervision. Violet and Charlie Ward were engaged before they parted, with the understanding that Violet was to spend a year at a celebrated *pension*, in Paris, while her mother was refitting and refurnishing the old family chateau by the sea.

It could not really be a regret to the family when they heard of the miserable end of their persecutor; though Florence did mourn for a father who had never shown her any but his good qualities.

The esteem and confidence which had grown up between Mr. Vernon and his client, finally culminated in marriage; which delighted Violet and made her, as she declared, "the happiest girl in the world."

And now her own wedding-day is but a few hours off!

She sits by her lover's side, while the golden rays of the setting sun pierce the quaint diamond panes, leaden-framed, of the drawing-room windows, and her eyes, falling before the fire of Charlie's gaze, dreamily follow the tracing of the fading, but exquisite needlework of the silken tapestries upon the wall.

All are happy except poor, desolate Florence.

She paces the stone terrace, looking off wistfully over the blue sea, where the sun has disappeared. The flowers, the tapers, the music, the feasting, the sight of the bride-elect in her fairness, vex the poor little soul of one who is not yet made perfect through suffering—though her character is vastly improved.

She thinks of her own brief courtship under the June moonlight—of her rash marriage—her brief joy—her bitter, overwhelming sorrow. Of the monotony of her life here, where she is loved, petted, cared for by kind friends, but where all is—to her—so monotonous, so little like the life of active joy and triumph her nature craves.

It seems to her as if she could never go back into the house and wish them happiness, while she is so sad and lonely. She stops in her slow walk, turns her face to the illimitable sea, and cries out, with a passionate sob:

"Oh, how forlorn! how forlorn!"

"Mrs. Harold—Florence!" speaks a deep, tender, trembling voice, "my darling! you shall be forlorn no more, unless it be from your own choice."

She turns, and by her side stands Redmond Rhodes. In all the stateliness of his middle age, and his natural reserve, he stands there, so tall that her head only reaches to his heart; but his eyes shine down upon hers with a will that she has no power to resist; she allows him to take and keep her trembling hand, and to bend and press on her purple hair a lover's kiss.

"I have loved you, little one," he said, "ever since the night when I washed the wrinkles from your child-forehead. I came back from Newport, that night in the long ago, to tell you so. I found Fraser Harold before me, and I gave you up. I have waited patiently a good while, and now I want you to answer me at once if I may have you?"

"With all my faults?" sobbed Florence, humbly.

"Yes, darling, with all your faults. I would not wish you to be perfect."

"You are very good and wise, Mr. Rhodes. I dare say you will make a better girl of me."

"When may I begin my attempts to reform you, sweet? To-morrow? Remember, I am not a boy, and I have waited two years."

There was much demurring and much argument, as they walked up and down the gray terrace, in sight of the twilit sea, quite oblivious of the banquet which was waiting; but the master carried his point at last, and on the morrow there was a double wedding.

THE END.

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